

# H-Diplo | ISSF Roundtable XI-12

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**M. Taylor Fravel. *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-691-15213-4.

6 March 2020 | <https://issforum.org/to/ir11-12>

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INTRODUCTION BY TAI MING CHEUNG, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

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Books on Chinese military issues have traditionally been of interest to a small and inward-looking community of security-minded China-focused academics and policy analysts far from the mainstream of their disciplinary fields and professions. But with China's growing prominence on the global stage, interest in Chinese defense and strategic matters has also become more widespread. This roundtable on M. Taylor Fravel's examination of contemporary Chinese military strategy underscores the gradual coming of age of Chinese security studies as an important and relevant component of the general security studies field, and in the process draws attention to a book that is both timely and highly significant.

*Active Defense* helps to shed significant new light into the nature and evolution of Chinese military strategy since the founding of the People's Republic of China seven decades ago. Understanding the changing substance of China's military strategic guidelines and the critical processes that shaped its development fills important gaps in knowledge about a critical building block in the making and application of Chinese military power. The key themes raised in the roundtable revolve around what constitutes major change in Chinese military strategy, what are the catalytic factors that lead to such major change, and the domestic dimensions of party unity and party- People's Liberation Army (PLA) relations and how that plays into decision-making processes.

The discussion between the roundtable participants on *Active Defense* displays to some extent the gap in the study of China between the general, and the China-specific defense research communities. There are structural reasons for this gap, much of which has to do with the age-old pedagogical country-specific versus functional divide. While Rosella Cappella Zielinski and Ryan Grauer are IR security scholars, Fravel, Oriana Mastro, and Alison Kaufman are part of an emerging vanguard of political scientists who have both, the rigorous methodological training combined with the deep China expertise needed to capably address Chinese security and defense matters in a broader context. This latter cohort, however, remains a minority in a sub-field that still largely remains qualitative and descriptive in nature.

The co-authored review by Cappella Zielinski and Grauer focuses on whether the theoretical framework put forward by Fravel has utility to security scholars in general, especially concerning the dynamics of major military change and the role played by a state's external environment and the nature of the relationship between civilian and military elites. They conclude that the theoretical and methodological parsimony in the book obscures some critical dynamics in the timing and process of China's military strategic change, generating unsurprising insights, even while it captures historical variation and rich empirics. Mastro's review points out that a major contribution of the book is its identification of major and minor changes in Chinese military strategy but she questions however the definition and use of party unity as a key theoretical variable in accounting for such changes in military strategy. In her review, Kaufman highlights the insights that Fravel provides on how authority operates and flows between the Party and the army. A key insight, according to Kaufman, is how Fravel shows the direct effect of intra-Party politics on the PLA's development. But she also raises the issue that perhaps *Active Defense*, despite Fravel's theoretical framework, is really about "China and China's military" rather than generalizable across cases.

As the roundtable discussion also points out, *Active Defense* only skims the surface of what has happened to Chinese military strategy since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Only 13 pages of a 280 page book cover the 2004 and 2014 updated military strategic guidelines, and there is debate about how to interpret the fragmentary evidence which is available. While this does make the book somewhat anti-climactic, especially for those looking for the latest clues into China's ongoing and accelerating military transformation and how the intensifying U.S.-China great power rivalry is affecting military strategic thinking, Fravel's work does provide historical context, pertinent information, and some of the analytical tools for more informed and rigorous analysis of what is going on today.

While *Active Defense* covers much historical ground, and examines a range of topics from military leadership, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as organizational and policy matters, there are major areas that are missing or are dealt with in passing. These areas would require a far more comprehensive treatment of Chinese military power. One of these gaps is the question of how military strategy relates to weapons acquisition, technological development, and resource matters.

When military strategy changes, can the country and its military establishment afford to carry out these changes? Strategy without resources is little more than empty talk.

In his response, Fravel addresses four main themes raised by these reviews: the concept of a major change in a state's military strategy; the nature of the theoretical motivations and mechanisms for major change; his decision to exclude the most recent changes to Chinese military strategy since the twenty-first century; and, finally, the implications of the book itself. Fravel agrees with the reviewers that *Active Defense* is mostly a China-focused study rather than a broader and more accessible examination of how states approach military strategy but raises the point that an analysis of China's particular approach to military doctrine and innovation could lead to more comparative studies.

As the roundtable discussions makes clear *Active Defense* is a timely and very important book that will significantly move forward the China defense studies field both in terms of its research findings and its methodological approach. It should also help to reduce the gap with the mainstream security studies field. While more can be done, what Taylor Fravel has accomplished is a great service to the field.

### Participants:

**M. Taylor Fravel** is the Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science and Director of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He studies international security, with a focus on China and East Asia. His books include *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949* (Princeton University Press, 2019) and *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton University Press, 2008). His work has also been published in journals such as *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and *Journal of Strategic Studies*.

**Tai Ming Cheung** is a Professor in the School of Global Policy and Strategy at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the director of the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation located at UCSD. He is a long-time analyst of Chinese and East Asian defense and national security affairs, especially defense economic, industrial and science and technological issues. He is the author of *Fortifying China: The Struggle to Build a Modern Defense Economy* (Cornell University Press, 2009), editor of *Forging China's Military Might: A New Framework for Assessing Innovation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), and co-editor of *The Gathering Pacific Storm: Emerging US-China Strategic Competition in Defense Technological and Industrial Development* (Cambria Press, 2018).

**Rosella Cappella Zielinski** is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Boston University. She is the author of *How States Pay for Wars* (Cornell University Press, 2016) winner of the 2017 American Political Science Association Robert L. Jervis and Paul W. Schroeder Best Book Award in International History and Politics.

**Ryan Grauer** is an Associate Professor of International Affairs in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and a faculty affiliate of the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the author of *Commanding Military Power: Organizing for Victory and Defeat on the Battlefield* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

**Alison A. Kaufman** (Ph.D., University of California-Berkeley) is a Principal Research Scientist in CNA's China and Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Division in Arlington, Virginia. She has long-standing research interests in Chinese views of conflict control and in the historical roots of current-day Chinese foreign policy. Recent publications include *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control* (CNA, 2016), co-authored with Daniel M. Hartnett; "In Pursuit of Equality and Respect: China's Diplomacy and the League of Nations," *Modern China* 40.6 (2013): 605-638, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700413502616>; and "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus* 25.1 (April 2010), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x>.

**Oriana Skylar Mastro** is an assistant professor of security studies at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University where her research focuses on Chinese military and security policy, Asia-Pacific security issues, war termination, and coercive diplomacy. Mastro continues to serve in the United States Air Force Reserve for which she works as a Senior China Analyst at the Pentagon. For her contributions to U.S. strategy in Asia, she won the Individual Reservist of the Year Award in 2016. She has published widely, including in *Foreign Affairs*, *International Security*, *International Studies Review*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *The Washington Quarterly*, *The National Interest*, and *Survival*, and is the author of *The Costs of Conversation: Obstacles to Peace Talks in Wartime*, (Cornell University Press, 2019). She holds a B.A. in East Asian Studies from Stanford University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University.

REVIEW BY ROSELLA CAPPELLA ZIELINSKI, BOSTON UNIVERSITY AND RYAN GRAUER,  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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In *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, Taylor Fravel seeks to explain drivers of change in China's efforts to secure itself against external threats since the end of World War II and, in doing so, makes a number of valuable contributions to scholarly understandings of Chinese strategic thinking and the causes of strategic change more generally. Perhaps most significantly, he has written the first book to examine the entirety of China's military strategic thought since the founding of the People's Republic as a cohesive body of work. Drawing upon a wide range of new and newly available sources, Fravel provides an empirical tour de force that meticulously documents changes in how Chinese elites conceived of and responded to their military strategic problems as well as how the state worked to implement its chosen operational doctrines, alter its force structures, and revamp its armed forces' training regimens to enact its evolving strategies. Historians of China will find the book to be of much interest, as will political scientists and scholars of international relations. Given the centrality of Chinese military power to understanding contemporary great-power dynamics, this book is a must-read for those studying the capabilities of rising powers as well as military organizations and strategic change. More broadly, it will certainly appeal to those interested in how external events interact with domestic governmental institutions—notably nonwestern, socialist, and Leninist institutions—to shape policy shifts and outcomes.

As two scholars of international relations with expertise in military organization and the execution of defense strategies rather than China, our review of Fravel's work takes as given the historical record as presented in the book and focuses instead on his theoretical framework and its broader utility to scholars interested in the kinds of questions he considers. In that regard, we would note that, while Fravel's empirical contributions are rich, his theoretical contributions are somewhat less so. Seeking to explain why and under what conditions China made major alterations to its military strategy, he deploys a parsimonious framework highlighting the power of two variables of types that are unsurprising to scholars of such matters: changes in the state's external environment and the nature of the relationship between its civilian and military elites. Fravel contends that, when China's external security environment changed such that existing conceptions of how to fight appeared outmoded and civilian and military elites were politically unified, change occurred. When either or both of these conditions did not obtain, China made either no change or only minor adjustments to its existing military strategy.

Significantly, Fravel's focus on China does lead him to make a few noteworthy theoretical claims that, with further exploration of the generalizability of his framework, could shed new light on the dynamics of military strategic change. First, he departs from existing literature on the drivers of such change, which emphasizes the roles played by factors like the emergence of new external security threat(s), requirements to undertake new missions, revised assessments of opponents' military strategies, technological change, or shifts in organizational biases and military culture.<sup>1</sup> Instead, Fravel argues that an important cause of the desire to revise military strategy is the conduct of warfare, as evidenced in the practices of great powers and their associated proxy wars (32-33). Especially in the absence of direct combat experience, observation of how the wars waged by other powerful—and potentially adversarial—states can provide important clues about the likely shape and course of any future war. To the extent that such foreshadowing raises doubts about the suitability of existing strategy, decision-makers will be incentivized to undertake efforts to revise and improve military war plans.

The incentive to begin the process of strategic revision is only part of the story, however. For true strategic change to occur, new plans and policies must be adopted and implemented. In addressing this point, Fravel's focus on China again leads him to depart from the existing literature in an interesting way. Specifically, noting that China is a socialist, one-party state and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a party-army rather than a national-army, Fravel argues that the degree of political

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955-1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

unity in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the mechanism through which strategic change is ultimately affected. When the party is unified in its beliefs on the appropriate direction forward, it will both permit the military to engage in the hard work of strategic revision and undertake the necessary policy changes to facilitate the adoption of the new approach that accords with political consensus. When disunity prevails within the party, on the other hand, strategic decision-making is likely to be paralyzed, as the military may be requisitioned for nonmilitary tasks, fractured due to political discord, or stymied as party leaders are unable to agree upon the appropriate direction of change. This insight, beyond shedding light on the process of strategic change in China, could well add to the growing body of work on the way in which civil-military relationships both operate and can influence other political phenomena in non-Western, non-democratic states.<sup>2</sup>

The interaction of these variables, Fravel contends, explains China's major changes and minor adjustments to, as well as periodic stasis in, its military strategy. By his count—which we do not dispute—there have been three major shifts in how conventional warfare has been waged since the CCP came to power in 1949: the continued mechanization of war that began in the early years of the twentieth century, as evidenced in World War II and crystalized in the 1950-1952 Korean War, paired with the emergence of nuclear weapons and the fear such tools would be used early in all future wars; the maturation of anti-tank and anti-aircraft warfare, as evidenced in the 1973 Yom Kippur War; and the precision and joint operations revolution, as evidenced in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. In each instance, Chinese military thinkers considered what the lessons of the wars were for how they should plan to fight any future war and pushed for appropriate strategic revisions. Specifically, in the 1950s, Chinese planners moved toward notions of positional defense and mobile offense to combat anticipated American amphibious assaults in northeast China. In the 1970s, they gravitated toward effected fixed defenses against potential armored and airborne assaults from the north by the Soviet Union. Finally, in the 1990s, they recognized the need to transform the PLA into a force that could carry out truly joint operations to combat potential threats in the southeast that would presumably emanate from Taiwan, potentially with American assistance. Official, CCP-authorized “strategic guidelines” documents encapsulating these changes were issued in 1956, 1980, and 1993, respectively—periods during which factionalism and infighting among civilian party elites was effectively eradicated. The strategic guidelines issued in 1960, 1977, 1988, 2004, and 2014, by contrast, contained either no substantial or only minor revisions to the preceding guidance documents that had introduced major change. Few strategic alterations were made in 1960, 1988, 2004, and 2014 because there had been no intervening observable change in the conduct of warfare and no change was made in 1977 because, even though the lessons of the Yom Kippur War had been made apparent, intra-party discord precluded the adoption of major revisions to China's strategic posture. The sole exception to the pattern that Fravel recounts—the only major change to China's strategic posture that cannot be explained by his theory—is the 1964 alteration dictated by Chairman Mao Zedong, which reintroduced many of the guerrilla-type principles that he had employed to great effect during the Chinese Civil War and the war against Japan.

Fravel's theoretical parsimony is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the straightforward framework both appears to capture much of the variation evident in the historical record and makes way for his rich empirics. On the other hand, its frugality, when applied to the historical record presented in the book, appears to obscure some critical dynamics and mechanisms that shape how both students and practitioners of international relations should think about the timing and process of China's military strategic change.

Take, for example, Fravel's claim about the specific causal roles his variables play in driving major military strategic change. A shift in the conduct of warfare, as evidenced in wars fought by great powers or their proxies, is *necessary* to instigate change, and party unity is *sufficient* to enact alterations (24). Both claims strike us as questionable. Consider first the causal power of shifts in the conduct of warfare. As Fravel himself notes, Su Yu, a famed commander during the Chinese Civil War who subsequently held a variety of high offices in both the CCP and PLA, began to worry about China's capacity to cope with a potential Soviet strike well before the Yom Kippur War and even submitted a report to Mao and other elites detailing his

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<sup>2</sup> For other examples of such work, see Stephen D. Biddle and Robert Zirkle, “Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare in the Developing World,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 19:2 (June 1996): 171-212; Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

concerns in February 1973—six months prior to the onset of the nominally exemplar conflict (145). Undoubtedly, Su’s ideas were informed and shaped by the 1973 Arab-Israeli War; his belief that China needed to revise its military strategy, however, does not seem to have been *caused* by it. Similarly, General Secretary of the CCP Jiang Zemin, in an address at an army-wide conference in late 1990, expressed the need to update China’s military strategy (199-200). Again, China’s discomfort with its strategic posture was evidenced prior to the conflict that, per Fravel’s theory, should have spurred the reconsideration. To be sure, there are many ways that Chinese elites could have begun to perceive the shifting nature of the conduct of conventional war prior to the 1973 and 1991 wars. However, the indisputable fact and substance of that shift was not clear until the actual fighting; belligerents and observers alike were shocked when Egypt decimated Israel’s armored counterattack in the Sinai and the United States and its coalition partners destroyed the world’s fourth-largest army in 100 hours. External evidence of shifts in the conduct of warfare strikes us as plausible as a worthy addition to the panoply of potential drivers of military strategic change. Evidence taking the form of combat operations in wars fought by great powers or their proxies, however, does not seem to be strictly necessary to spur recognition that major strategic change is needed.

Party unity, then, does not seem sufficient to enact major strategic change. Logically, sufficiency indicates that the antecedent in question will, on its own, cause the phenomenon to be explained. Certainly, party unity—specifically, Mao’s successful reconsolidation of power in the early 1960s—appears to have been sufficient to cause the major strategic change enacted in 1964, which, contrary to Fravel’s theory, occurred in the absence of a significant shift in the way in which conventional warfare was conducted. However, there were several other periods of party unity between 1949 and the present in which party unity was achieved but major strategic change was not undertaken. Thinking of party unity as a sufficient condition for major change overpredicts strategic variability in China. Setting aside the anomalous 1964 case, it may be that the external stimulus of a shift in the conduct of conventional warfare and party unity are *jointly* necessary to get major strategic change in China but, even then, it is not entirely clear from Fravel’s framework what indicators we should look to if we are to accurately account for the former.

Stepping back from the question of the fit of Fravel’s theoretical framework to the historical record reported in *Active Defense*, it is not clear precisely whether the proffered framework fully captures the essential dynamics of “major strategic change.” In his explication of the concept, Fravel notes that “Major change occurs when the adoption of a new military strategy drives a military organization to alter how it prepares to conduct operations and wage war. Major change requires that a military develop capabilities that it does not already possess to perform activities that it cannot currently undertake” (11). Implicit in this conception of major change is that it is only achieved when the requisite organizational changes attendant to the shift are implemented in the force. This implication is bolstered in Fravel’s operationalization of major change when he notes that such shifts are evidenced by alterations in a state’s operational doctrine, force structure, and training regimens (30-32); we know a major change has happened when we see significant alterations along these three dimensions. The logical outcome of this emphasis is that observers should only denote major strategic change—both its incidence and substance—when the organizational alterations necessary to support the new form of warfare are realized in the force.

In his case studies, however, Fravel seems to shift focus to a degree. Specifically, he stresses the promulgation of new strategic guidelines at various party congresses as evidence of major strategic change and, though there is discussion of changes to operational doctrines, force structures, and training regimens, the organizational indicators of the alteration no longer appear to be as essential to understanding *when* and, in some cases, *whether* the strategic reformulation has actually occurred. As a result of this shifting focus, a curious phenomenon is reported but not explained: the speed with which China implemented its new strategies varied considerably. In Fravel’s telling, many of the organizational shifts that were required to implement the 1956 strategic guidelines were underway prior to the official promulgation of the new strategy and largely in place two or three years after the strategic reorientation (75-76, 81-90, 104-106). In the 1980 case, changes to the training regimen were initiated immediately but alterations to operational doctrine and force structures did not begin until 1982 and were not complete until 1987 (165-171). Similarly, in 1993, the revision of operational regulations took six years to complete (209) and changes to China’s force structure were still ongoing after 2003 (215). Far from being an esoteric curiosity, however, we would argue that this peculiar variation is central to the questions of dating and assessing the substance and quality of major strategic change: a PLA that had only partially implemented strategic reforms would perform

very differently in combat than one that had completed the transition. Fravel's chosen variables do not seem to help in explaining this variation; by the time implementation was attempted, there was evidence of shifts in the conduct of conventional warfare and party unity in each case. What is it, then, that explains variation in Chinese implementation? Why did the PLA achieve the requisite organizational reforms more quickly in some cases than in others? Despite the uniqueness of the PLA's status as a party-army, it seems to us that traditional variables drawn from the corpus of organization theory like service-specific pathologies, parochial interests of different service or regional commanders, and budgetary constraints—omitted from this analysis—could be both relevant and necessary to fully understand the dynamics of China's major strategic changes.

The theoretical critiques detailed above reflect our selfish desire for more rather than a serious impugnation of Fravel's work. *Active Defense* is a terrific study that breaks new ground empirically and suggests potentially useful new theoretical tools for understanding why nonwestern states and militaries change and adopt the strategies that they do. Future scholars would do well to build on the foundation Fravel has laid and address not only the kinds of questions we pose above, but also the generalizability of the model across space and time. Given its exceptional current and agenda-setting value, it will surely be a staple on practitioners' and scholars' bookshelves for the foreseeable future.

## REVIEW BY ALISON A. KAUFMAN, CNA, VIRGINIA

Taylor Fravel's book *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949* makes good on its promise to "explain when, why, and how China has pursued major change in its military strategy" (4). There have been plenty of publications in recent years seeking to understand and analyze the development of China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Fravel's stands out for its focus on a single unifying theme: the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s periodic issuance of a "Military Strategic Guideline" that is formulated at the highest levels of government and from which flow the major elements of military strategy, operational doctrine, force structure, training regimens, and other key aspects of military development. The book provides a parsimonious explanation for why the Guideline has changed at certain times, and how much it has changed, across two main variables: shifting perceptions among Chinese leaders of the conduct of warfare in the international system, and sufficient unity within the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to enable this change to occur without threatening Party stability or national security.<sup>1</sup> Fravel's argument is simple, elegant, and memorable.

There are several elements of Fravel's book that I found particularly thought-provoking. The first is the light that it sheds on the dynamics that propel the development of a Party-army. The second is the questions it raises about the uniqueness of China's approach to military change and modernization. And the third is the striking continuity that runs through many Chinese aspirations for and concerns about military development from the beginning of the People's Republic through today.

In his introduction, Fravel highlights several ways in which *Active Defense* contributes to our understanding of the PRC's approaches to military strategy: as an atypical case against which to test existing theories of strategic change; as the most complete to date empirical account of Chinese military strategy—and shifts in that strategy—since the founding of the People's Republic (and even before); and as a baseline for assessing future changes in Chinese military strategy. But he leaves out what I see as the single most valuable contribution of this book to our understanding of Chinese strategy and policy—military or otherwise. That is the story it tells about how authority operates and flows in a Party-army and a Party-state. Fravel notes that "in socialist states, the more appropriate subject of study is not civil-military relations, but 'party-military relations'" (19), and in *Active Defense* he sets out to show how the dynamics of this relationship over time have directly shaped the modern Chinese way of war. He describes the CCP's internal ruptures, consensuses, and debates that help to explain when and why Chinese leadership chose to greenlight significant military changes and hand over decision-making power to the PLA and when it did not. Notably, he also highlights the general process by which the CCP and the PLA have contemplated and implemented policy change, describing a dizzying sequence of series of speeches, lectures, "major meetings," symposia, and military exercises (e.g., 178 and 188-189) that preceded major shifts in the Military Strategic Guideline.

By tracing these dynamics, Fravel shows the direct effect of intra-Party politics on the PLA's development. Although, as he points out, several PRC leaders chose to leave PLA affairs and decisions largely to the military, this is a choice, not a necessity of the system. The PLA is *always* politicized, because it is the armed branch of a political party. For the PLA, the question is not whether the Party will keep a leash on military affairs, but how long that leash will be. This question comes through loud and clear in Fravel's chapter about the almost complete lack of change in Chinese nuclear policy since its early years: it hasn't changed because Party leaders declared it an untouchable aspect of Chinese national strategy. He describes what happened

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<sup>1</sup> The Military Strategic Guideline (or "Guidelines," depending on the translation) was also the focus of David M. Finkelstein's "[China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines.'](#)" in Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military* (Carlisle: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 69–140. Finkelstein's analysis provides a critical overview of the purpose and contents of the Military Strategic Guideline over several iterations. However, unlike Fravel, Finkelstein does not seek to offer a systematic explanation for why the Guideline has changed at particular times and not at others.

when Chinese military professionals tried to study the issue on their own without receiving authority to do so from the Party: the investigation was “killed” and the PLA’s leadership admonished for overstepping its boundaries (263-264).

Understanding the Party-army dynamic is critical, because it blows open a false assumption that some hold about the PLA—that somehow it is not possible for a military, or military personnel, to be both Party-led and professional. For example, uninformed observers may assume that PLA political commissars are incompetent Party hacks who are capable of doing little more than tracking political misbehavior and quoting Mao’s ‘Little Red Book.’ In fact, PLA political commissars undergo significant operational training and have significant decision-making power. Many PLA officers have had overseas training and a wide range of experiences, and underestimating their professional capabilities is a mistake. Party membership is not an either/or distinction that disqualifies military professionals from making clear-sighted assessments of the PLA’s material capabilities and weaknesses. That said, the Party-army structure does provide an absolute chain of command that determines whether those assessments get turned into policy. As described by Fravel, the PLA’s senior leadership has, for much of the PRC’s history, been able to direct military modernization in ways that make sense for their identities both as professional military leaders *and* as high-ranking members of the CCP. Fravel is certainly not the first scholar to explicate the Party-army relationship, but it is a lesson that cannot be taught too many times.<sup>2</sup>

A second aspect of *Active Defense* that provokes thought is the discussion of Chinese attitudes toward emulating other countries’ military strategies. Fravel argues that there is little convincing evidence that Chinese strategic change has ever been driven by a desire to copy other nations. Rather, although Chinese military leaders and scholars spent (and still spend) considerable time studying the experiences, doctrines, and capabilities of foreign militaries, China’s strategic change is described as being always in the service of attempting to Sinify those approaches to fit what they view as the unique circumstances and mores of modern China. This underscores a broader question: How uniquely “Chinese” *is* the PLA’s approach to military reform? And, how unique is it likely to be in the future? For the most part, the Chinese leaders in Fravel’s narrative argue that it was China’s technological “backwardness” and its particular international circumstances that required China to develop its own “military science” that would allow for an asymmetric approach that plays to China’s limited advantages. This raises the question of the extent to which, as the PRC moves closer to the center of the world stage and as its military advances, China’s circumstances continue to require a singular approach to military modernization and strategic change. Is there an inevitable logic of modern warfare that means that the PLA will look more and more like other militaries over time? Or, if part of China’s claim to uniqueness is an argument that its deep cultural and historical roots demand that it be different, will we see forms of military modernization and organization that differ substantively (not just rhetorically) from that of other countries?

To gauge this, it would have been useful to know how different the Chinese approach to strategic and operational change really is from that in other states. Leaving aside the question of who makes the final decisions, are the actual goals and implementation of military change in the PLA unique? Or do they look rather similar to the ways in which other militaries have developed over time? Fravel does not ask this question and does not provide comparison cases, so it is hard to say.

A third useful aspect of *Active Defense* is that by so closely recounting the operational and organizational changes that accompanied each shift in the Military Strategic Guideline, Fravel shows us the long lineage of many concerns that shape PLA reforms to this day. Even major changes in the Military Strategic Guideline on how to fight a war (with the exception

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<sup>2</sup> For a small sampling of works covering a broad range of perspectives on the Party-army relationship in China, see, for example: Ellis Joffe, “Party-Army Relations in China: Retrospect and Prospect,” *The China Quarterly* 146 (June 1996): 299-314, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000045045>; Fang Zhu, *Gun Barrel Politics: Party-Army Relations in Mao’s China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); David Shambaugh, “Civil-Military Relations in China: Party-Army or National Military?” *Copenhagen Journal of International Studies* 16 (2002): 10-29, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v16i0.3>; Andrew Scobell, “China’s Evolving Civil-Military Relations: Creeping *Guojihua*,” *Armed Forces and Society* 31:2 (Winter 2005): 229-230, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0503100204>; Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, *Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA’s Role in Elite Politics* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2010).

of the retrograde change in 1964 that was driven by Mao Zedong's ideological concerns) do not seem to have deviated significantly from a trajectory that has consistently emphasized the ability to conduct combined or joint operations (75 and 77), the need to downsize ground forces (95), the challenges of keeping up technologically with the accelerated pace of modern warfare (89), concerns with the centralization of authority and other organizational challenges (87), an ever greater attention to the operational level of war (166), and above all the need to constantly re-instill and reinforce Party discipline—all of which are significant components of the most recent round of reforms under PRC President Xi Jinping that began in 2014. In this sense *Active Defense* is as much a story of continuity, and of unfinished business, as it is of change. Thus when Fravel notes (169) that some reforms proposed in the 1980s were not put into place until the 2000s, we can see this as suggesting that the same problems were still viewed as relevant two or more decades later even as the specific types of wars that the PLA thought it might have to fight had shifted. This suggests that someone seeking to understand the future of PLA reforms might look to the unfinished business from previous rounds of reforms.

For scholars of the Chinese military, the book is impressive in its sourcing and in its detail. For readers less familiar with Chinese military history and concepts, the discussion of the Red Army's pre-1949 development in Chapter 2 is very helpful for contextualizing both the politics and the operational guidance that followed. Methodologically, I would have liked a clearer statement of the fact that it is rare for outsiders to have direct access to many of the high-level strategic documents discussed here, and that the contents of those documents are more likely gleaned from post-hoc Party-approved writings about them, such as memoirs, study guides, and newspaper articles. Fravel makes passing reference to this fact with regard to post-1993 adjustments to the Military Strategic Guideline, and provides copious footnotes detailing his sources, but does not emphasize it. Finally, at some points the CCP inside baseball gets somewhat tedious for readers who do not ordinarily focus on such issues; it is too cursory to be an in-depth study of intra-Party politics but too detailed to skip over. That said, Fravel was in the unenviable position of needing to provide enough details on intra-Party dynamics to prove his thesis, without having that become the focus of his work; for the most part he does so admirably.

*Active Defense* is less fully-formed as a work of international relations theory than as a study of the PLA. Fravel notes that “existing scholarship on the PLA lacks sufficient integration with the literature on military doctrine and innovation from political science ... [which] hinders findings from the ‘China case’ from engaging arguments in the broader theoretical literature [and] inhibits comparisons across cases ...” (3). He briefly nods to the desire to understand “when and why states pursue major changes in military strategy” (5). Ultimately, however, this book is not about “states” writ large. It is about China and China's military. It is true that Fravel has created a framework that can, in theory, be applied to and tested on shifts in other countries' military strategies, particularly in single-party states. But the number of cases to which this framework would apply seems quite small and he does not specify which ones these might be. I do not see this as a great failing because the empirics are, to my mind, both more interesting and more important than shoehorning them into a theoretical framework. A reader seeking to understand where China's military has come from and where it might be going will come away richly informed. But a reader looking for comparative insights into strategic change writ large may be disappointed.

Overall, *Active Defense* is a fascinating and useful read. Its broad utility is evidenced when read alongside the PRC's new defense white paper, *China's National Defense in the New Era* (2019), which was released just a few days before this review was completed.<sup>3</sup> The white paper's section on “Implementing the Military Strategic Guideline for a New Era” does not mention a single concept that Fravel does not address in detail in his book, including (but not limited to) active defense, “post-strike response” and counterattack, strategic competition, people's war, and no-first-use nuclear policy. *Active Defense* provides an invaluable context and starting point for anyone seeking to understand the trajectory of Chinese strategic change and military modernization.

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<sup>3</sup> State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era* (24 July 2019); for an English-language version, see [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2019-07/24/content\\_4846443.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2019-07/24/content_4846443.htm).

REVIEW BY ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

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*Active Defense* is a lengthy, dense book on Chinese military strategy that is surprisingly easy to read thanks to the author's focus on a smooth historical narrative and clear prose. This book fills a huge lacuna in the literature and can easily be considered *the* definitive account of the Chinese military strategy and how it has evolved over the past hundred years. Moreover, this study provides an important non-European case about sources of change in military organizations.

This review begins by summarizing the argument and the main contributions of the book to the literature on Chinese military strategy. I then discuss some of the weaknesses of the book, in particular the introduction of the Party unity variable. My bottom line assessment is Fravel's book is ambitious in its historical scope, impressive in its empirical use of hundreds of Chinese language materials, and accurate in its account of the evolution of Chinese strategy. However, its theoretical contribution is less solid, thus leaving some questions about its implications for China today.

The book seeks to answer two questions: when and how has China pursued major change in its military strategy? Why did China introduce a major change in its military strategy in 1956, 1980 and 1993 but not at other times? Fravel argues that external pressure, specifically shifts in the international conduct of warfare, convinced the Chinese military leadership to update their strategic approach. However, major changes (vs minor) only occurred when internal factors were also aligned properly – specifically the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was unified and stable.

First, the book tries to explain when major change occurred. Fravel argues that changes in operational doctrine, force structure, and training need to occur for a change can be considered major. Operational doctrine “refers to the principles and concepts that describe how a military plans to conduct operations” (30). Force structure “refers to the composition of an armed force in terms of both the relative roles of different services (such as the army and the navy) and within a given service, its branches or combat arms (such as infantry and armor)” (31). Training refers to both the educational training, political training, and combat training provided to the branches of the PLA. Fravel seems to suggest changes are needed in all three areas in order for them to constitute a major change in military strategy, but this argument is somewhat unclear. Can one have change in only two areas and still have a major change in military strategy? Or what about all three, but if those changes are minor? Also, where does force posture fit in? The book shies away from discussing how Chinese military systems and platforms have evolved over the past 70 years, and I consider this a major indicator of the PRC's military strategy. This questions really come to the fore in relation to Fravel's post-1993 cases, but I will return to that later in this review.

In terms of methodology, the book does include case studies of major, minor, and no change in military strategy to avoid selection bias. He compares the cases of major change to the others “to determine which motivations and mechanisms best account for the major changes” (26). The case studies also include a detailed account of the process of change that convincingly identifies the mechanisms through which it occurred. The research consists of a longitudinal study of one country's military strategy over the course of seventy years; looking at one country over time has many methodological advantages including the control of confounding variables such as regime type, culture, geography, etc. With this tool kit, Fravel then goes through nine case studies—three of major change, four of minor change, and two cases when one may expect change to have occurred but it did not.

The identification and description of the major and minor changes in Chinese military strategy, as well as the process of its evolution, is the major contribution of this book. Fravel challenges commonly held beliefs about Chinese military strategy and provides a vastly more accurate and detailed account. To date, the conventional understanding among Chinese military specialists was that Chinese military strategy could be categorized chronologically as people's war; people's war under modern conditions; local wars under modern conditions, local wars under high-tech conditions to the contemporary local

wars under informatized conditions.<sup>1</sup> Fravel argues that instead the evolution is best understood as “Defending the Motherland” in 1956, to “Luring the Enemy in Deep in 1964 to the 1993 “Local Wars under High-Tech Conditions” followed by the minor changes in informatization. It is hard to overstate the impact of this research for the Chinese military field.

The book presents an accurate and richly detailed account of China’s military strategy. However, some theoretical and empirical questions remain.

My only substantive empirical question involves Fravel’s determination that the 2004 and 2014 changes in military strategy were minor, and relatedly that no changes had occurred in the nature of warfare since 1993. Though it is outside my area of expertise, this does not seem right. The United States fought the 1999 Kosovo War and in Afghanistan and Iraq during this period. China did observe how the nature of these conflicts was distinct from the Gulf War, in particular the heavy reliance and benefits of command, control, computers, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR), and therefore space and cyber, to include the integration of unmanned systems into warfighting. The amount of real-time data created and used in the latter conflicts was exponentially higher than that of the first Gulf War.

Not only would I say that the nature of warfare has changed since 1993, but I would argue that China adapted in response, and its decision to move from planning for high-tech wars to informatized wars was a significant change. This is what motivates China’s cyber, counterspace and to a degree, electronic warfare programs, for example. The Chinese only began to modernize in earnest in the late 1990s and have made huge leaps over the past twenty years. China’s navy was a glorified coast guard that could not sail beyond visual range of the coast line. Its pilots, poorly trained with few flight hours, could not fly at night or over water. Its nuclear forces still relied on liquid fuel and storage in silos, both of which greatly reduced its survivability. And none of the services had modern, mechanized equipment. Indeed, the mechanization of the Chinese military is only scheduled to be completed two years from now.

In terms of Fravel’s indicators of major change, China has been undergoing the largest reform program in its history, with a complete restructuring of the force that has led to a change in the composition of the Central Military Commission (CMC). There has also been a complete overhauling of training and exercises with the result that they are larger in scale and more realistic. The Chinese navy moved from only providing near seas defense to planning for a combination of near seas defense and far seas protection, which means protecting the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs). This change is a fundamental reason why scholars debate whether the Chinese military will be global. And this understanding of the critical importance of information technology to the U.S. way of war led China to develop capabilities to undermine the U.S. ability to leverage information effectively. In other words, China’s anti-access area denial (A2/AD) strategy is derived from its military strategy of winning local informatized wars. But Fravel’s theory still holds up given this disagreement over the value of the variables. I am arguing that there was a change in the nature of warfare at the system’s level that led to a major change in China’s military strategy, while Fravel’s book argues that there was no change in either variable.

On the theory, more work could be done to couch the book and its findings within the research of the non-political science People’s Liberation Army (PLA)-watching community. For example, for his three indicators, I wondered how they differed from David Finkelstein’s three pillars, which he derives from the PLA lexicon of *junshi lilian*, *junshi sixiang* and *zhengguihua*.<sup>2</sup> Also, the author uses military doctrine, strategy, and the strategic guidelines interchangeably, which brushes aside a longstanding debate in the China military community about what constitutes military strategy, doctrine or military

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<sup>1</sup> For just one example, see James Mulvenon and David Finkelstein, eds., *China’s Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, (Alexandria: Center for Naval Analysis, 2005),

<sup>2</sup> David M. Finkelstein, “Thinking about the PLA’s ‘Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs,’” in James Mulvenon and David Finkelstein, ed., *China’s Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, (Alexandria: Center for Naval Analysis, 2005), 1-27.

thought/theory in PLA thinking. Additionally, when he discusses the People's War, he contends that the conventional understanding focused on guerilla warfare, while he argues that the People's War is more about the use of conventional forces (and should be referred to as 'luring in the deep.'). However, it was my understanding that after the civil war the focus was on conventional forces, the 'people's' part referring to the martial spirit and will of the Chinese troops, which Chairman Mao Zedong thought could overcome technologically superior opponents.<sup>3</sup> Last, and most importantly, Fravel writes that the conduct of warfare in the international system shapes Chinese military strategy, and this has long been "overlooked" (4). This may be the case for political scientists, but Chinese military specialists have long argued that China is an acute observer of other conflicts and its military adapts according to its conclusions about the nature of warfare in the international system.<sup>4</sup> This is not to trivialize Fravel's contribution, which is significant. However, I would argue it is best understood as 1) demonstrating that change in threat is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for change in military strategy and 2) showing more systemically and in greater detail how Chinese perceptions about the nature of warfare impacted changes in military strategy.

My main questions revolve about the variable of Party unity, which Fravel introduces to explain when military strategy experiences major or minor. Party unity is defined as "the agreement among the top party leaders on basic policy questions...and the structure of power within the party" (20). He argues that when the Party is unified, it delegates authority over military strategy to the PLA. However, it is unclear how this relates to other issues of elite politics. For example, is this issue the same as the degree of factionalism? In the book, purges are a sign of Party disunity, but could they result in Party unity? Also, he argues that Party unity is important because, under these conditions, the armed forces "remain beholden to only one actor, the party" (20). Fravel suggests that the main factor that allows the military to have more autonomy in deciding military strategy is the fact that the Party has mechanisms to ensure that the military will adopt policies consistent with the Party's broader political objectives.<sup>5</sup> However, even as Party unity varied from 1949 to today, it seems to me that the military was overall loyal to the Party and that these mechanisms were always in place, with the possible exception of the years of the Cultural Revolution.

This leads me to my last question about the theory: how important is the Party disunity variable? The shift in nature of warfare explains seven out of nine cases, and one of those cases is 1964, which Fravel argues is not explained by his theory anyway. So, it was only important in 1977 and that was the end of the Cultural Revolution. In terms of nuclear strategy, Fravel notes that it was not Party disunity that caused strategy to remain unchanged, but rather the reluctance of the Party to delegate authority over something so important to the military. I had a hard time understanding how it was measured as well and whether Xi Jinping's China is one of Party unity or disunity (though Fravel argues that it is the former). For example, Fravel argues that when the composition of the Politburo Standing Committee changes, (36) this can be a sign of disunity - but this now happens every seven years. He notes that a change in successor is a sign of disunity, but what about a situation in which no successor is appointed, as Xi has done? Xi is engaging in one of the farthest reaching anti-corruption campaigns in China's history, which seems like disunity, but then there is great continuity in membership in leading bodies of the Party and agreement over core policies, so those are signs of unity.

Last, I would have liked more on what Fravel's findings mean for contemporary China post-2014, which he covers in three pages in the conclusion. For example, in one of his cases (1964) the change was initiated by the central leader (Mao) and not

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<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> This is a topic mentioned every year at the annual PLA conference at the U.S. Army War College and the logic can be found in the resulting edited volumes. A list of the numerous volumes can be found here: <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/people.cfm?authorID=663>

<sup>5</sup> Also, Fravel states that in Party armies the senior military officers have more autonomy in the management of military affairs than in national armies. I would be interested in an expansion of this argument, especially since my understanding is that failure to delegate to lower levels and lack of autonomy of a PLA officer are primary weaknesses of the Chinese military.

the military for domestic political reasons during a time of great disunity. I would have appreciated more information about the conditions under which he thinks such a divergence is more likely. Also, Fravel argues in these last pages that a major change in military strategy could be precipitated in the future by a significant change in threat perception or China's expanding national interests. If threat and interests will drive China's strategy in the future, then why did they not do so in the past? For the strategist, the contents of the military strategy, including when and how China will use force, are of great interest. Hopefully we can look forward to a third book from Fravel that addresses these issues.

RESPONSE BY M. TAYLOR FRAVEL, MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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I am delighted to have this opportunity for *Active Defense* to be poked, prodded, and reviewed by Alison Kaufman, Oriana Mastro, Rosella Cappella Zielinski, and Ryan Grauer. I am especially grateful because I realize that I did not write a short book. I also want to thank Tai Ming Cheung for writing the introduction to this roundtable, Manjari Miller for organizing it, and Diane Labrosse for editing it.

My goal in writing *Active Defense* was to explain when and why China has pursued major changes in its military strategy, what the People's Liberation Army (PLA) calls 'strategic guidelines' (*zhanlue fangzhen*). Since 1949, the PLA has adopted nine unique military strategies. Those strategies adopted in 1956, 1980, and 1993 represent what I describe as "major changes" because they were efforts to transform the PLA in order to wage war in a new kind of way. The book develops a theoretical argument to explain why major change was pursued at these moments and not at other times. In a nutshell, I argue China has pursued major changes in military strategy in response to significant shifts in the conduct of warfare in the international system—but only when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a party was united and delegated substantial authority for military affairs to senior PLA officers. The book also examines Chairman Mao Zedong's intervention into strategic decisionmaking with his effort to shift China's military strategy in 1964 back to the concept of 'luring the enemy in deep,' which is an important negative case. Finally, the book examines China's most recent military strategies in the 2000s as well as the continuity of China's approach to nuclear strategy since 1964, as this was the one area of defense policy that top party leaders did not delegate to senior military officers.

Although I appreciate the many kind words about the book in the reviews, each review also raised important questions and critiques that I will discuss below. These focus on the indicators of a major change in military strategy, elements of the theoretical argument, interpretations of the evidence in the 2000s, and some implications of the book's findings.

#### *Major Change in Military Strategy*

To start, Zielinski and Grauer raise an important question about what the book seeks to explain and, in particular, the concept of a major change in a state's military strategy. Specifically, they wonder about variation in the speed with which a major change in military strategy is implemented, noting that, at some points in the People's Republic of China's (PRC) strategic history, such changes were pursued more rapidly than at other times. This raises an important distinction between the decision to pursue a major change in a state's military strategy and whether the effort is successful or not (or how long it might take to achieve). I focused on the former—the decision to pursue major change—and not the pace or success of implementation. The main reason is that the same causal logic is unlikely to be able to account for both the decision to pursue a major change and its implementation. These are different outcomes that warrant separate theories. Thus, I used the concept of a major change in military and the associated indicators to determine whether a new strategy represented a significant departure from one it had replaced and whether efforts were made to reform the PLA in a manner consistent with the new strategy in order to be able to ensure that the introduction of a new strategy represented more than just cheap talk. That said, Zielinski and Grauer raise a terrific question about the rate or pace of organizational change in militaries in general and the PLA in particular, which future work may be able to examine in more detail than I was able to in *Active Defense*.

Mastro also raises several questions about the indicators associated with major change. First, she asks whether organizational change needs to be attempted in all three areas in order to be considered a major change. At least in my conceptualization, if a new strategy contains a vision of warfare that requires an armed force to be able to conduct substantially new kinds of tasks and to wage war in a new way, then one should observe efforts to pursue reform in all three areas. New forces would be developed, new operational doctrines would be devised for those forces, and new training regimens would be put in place so that those forces would be able to operate in a new way. Second, Mastro asks whether, taken together, minor changes in all three can constitute a major change. My view is that it would remain a minor change overall and would likely be the product of a vision of warfare that itself did not call for a major change in the tasks an armed force should be able to conduct. Third,

Mastro asks whether force posture is another possible indicator. At least in my approach, force posture would be contained in the strategy itself and reflected in the operational doctrine and force structure required to achieve the strategy's goals.

### *Theory*

The reviewers also raised several questions about the theory. Starting with the external motivation for a major change in strategy, Zielinski and Grauer wonder whether significant shifts in the conduct of warfare are “strictly necessary” to spark a change in military strategy. Within the general argument that I develop in the book, a shift in the conduct of warfare (or another external motivation, as reviewed on 13-14) serves as the motivation or catalyst for a major change in strategy such that the change would not have occurred either at the same time or in the same way than it would have done had the catalyst been absent. So, a significant shift in warfare is strictly necessary in this sense, within the theory's approach. Yet, like many theories, it is probabilistic and not deterministic and not strictly necessary in an empirical sense. Zielinski and Grauer then cite examples of general Su Yu in the 1970s and General Secretary Jiang Zemin in the 1990s to suggest an alternative, namely, that “discomfort with [China's] strategic posture” preceded any demonstration of how warfare had changed in an actual conflict and thus, by implication, caused the change in strategy rather than what might have been revealed on the battlefield. Although Zielinski and Grauer do not state what they believe causes “discomfort,” a brief review of both instances is necessary because I do not believe either provides strong support for their alternative interpretation. In the case of Su Yu and the 1980 strategy, the external threat posed by the Soviet Union played a role in this strategy, along with shifts in the conduct of warfare (139). Su Yu's 1973 report clearly reflected his concerns about the threat, as the 1973 war had not yet occurred. But in his roughly ten reports or lectures on questions relating to strategy after the Yom Kippur War until his landmark lecture in January 1979, Su Yu was also responding to how he saw warfare as changing and the clear implications for how to defend China in this new light. If the 1973 war had not happened, it is unclear whether Su Yu would have reached the same conclusions that he did by 1979. The case of Jiang Zemin is more straightforward. Although Jiang said in 1990 that strategy should be adjusted if circumstances change, he was only making a general statement about changing strategy if necessary. In the speech itself, however, Jiang did not call for China to change its military strategy. Instead, he affirmed the existing strategy associated with his predecessor Deng Xiaoping. Only after the Gulf War occurred did senior PLA officers conclude that circumstances had changed and the strategy should be revised.

Also in the context of external motivations for change in strategy, Mastro asks, “if threat and interests will drive China's strategy in the future, then why did they not do so in the past?” The question of threats is an empirical one, given that it is a plausible motivation for any state and not just China to pursue a change in strategy (13). As I endeavor to show in the book, threats played less of a role in the major changes in military strategy that the PLA pursued. When China adopted its first military strategy in 1956, it viewed its security environment as being generally stable despite the confrontation with the United States (72, 90). The 1980 strategy was partly a response to the Soviet threat, but the PLA's ability to respond was hamstrung by disunity within the party. The 1993 strategy was adopted at a time when, in the words of General Secretary and Central Military Commission (CMC) chairman, Jiang Zemin, China faced its most benign environment since the country's founding (182). The role of interests is really a question of expanding interests. Although expanding interests as a motivation for change in strategy is established in the literature, it is most relevant for rising powers whose interests expand significantly beyond their borders. Thus, this motivation for changing strategy could only perhaps explain the most recent strategy adopted in 2014, as Chinese interests did not really begin to expand significantly until the mid to late 2000s. However, because Taiwan remains the main scenario informing the current strategy, expanding interests do not appear to provide a compelling explanation.

Turning to the mechanisms of change, Zielinski and Grauer raise an important question about party unity as a variable. Here, my single, infelicitous use of the phrase “sufficient condition” (24) may have created some misunderstanding, namely, that I view party unity as having an independent effect on change in military strategy such that a major change should occur whenever the party was unified. Of course, as evident elsewhere in the book where the theory is summarized (4-5, 9, 24-25, 271) as well as in the diagram on page 25, I do not conceptualize the effect of party unity in this way. Instead, it only matters in the context of a prior external catalyst or motivation to change strategy, which is analytically prior to party unity. Once a motivation to change strategy is present, party unity then shapes whether or not it occurs. As described in the book, for example, the lack of party unity delayed changes in strategy in 1980 and 1993.

Mastro also raises several questions about party unity. Although I cannot answer all of them here, I view factionalism as a dynamic in Chinese politics that could create disunity within the highest levels of the party, but factionalism itself is distinct from disunity. To the degree factions exist, they can also do so in a way that does not challenge the structure of authority within the party or its basic policies. Based on this conceptualization of party unity, I see the party as united today in General Secretary Xi Jinping's China because he is acknowledged as the undisputed leader, and there is no evidence of a split in the leadership over policy issues (even if many are unhappy with his leadership). Perhaps paradoxically, Xi's lack of a successor reflects party unity in this way. In terms of measuring disunity, changes in the composition of the Politburo Standing Committee could signal disunity if they were atypical, such as the removal of a large proportion of members eligible for staying on this body or changes outside the schedule of party congresses. Routine changes in Politburo Standing Committee membership, based on retirements, would not be a sign of disunity at the top.

*China's Strategies in the 2000s*

On the empirics, Mastro raises two important points about the 2004 and 2014 strategies. First, she questions my conclusion "that no changes had occurred in the nature of warfare since 1993." However, although I claim that there has been no significant shift in the conduct of warfare that would spark a new military strategy in the 2000s, nowhere do I write that no change in warfare has occurred. Moreover, on pages 218-230, I show how the PLA did track changes in the conduct of warfare in the Kosovo and Iraq wars and, based on these assessments, enacted a minor change in military strategy in the shift from "high technology conditions" to "informatized conditions" in 2004. Even though a significant shift in the conduct of warfare did not occur, the PLA did observe changes in warfare occurring in the Kosovo and Iraq wars, which in turn informed the adjustment in strategy, as my theory expects.

Second, regarding 2014, this strategy was the most difficult to analyze both because it is the most recent and because even fewer sources have been published in China on military affairs since around 2015. Within the framework of my theory, I view it as a minor change for several reasons. First, as discussed in the book, based on available sources, the 2014 strategy further emphasized informatization from the 2004 strategy but does not contain a dramatically new vision of warfare, even though the maritime domain received more attention than in the past. Second, it appears to have been adopted to justify the unprecedented reforms of the PLA that were announced at the end of 2015. However, the main impetus for these changes was to enable the PLA to be able to conduct the kinds of joint operations identified in 1993 and especially 2004 strategies. In other words, the 2014 strategy did not contain a new vision of warfare. Instead, it was premised largely on earlier vision. Of course, if these reforms are successfully implemented, they will have a huge effect on the PLA's effectiveness and are critical to understanding the PLA even if they are not a major change in strategy, as defined in the book. Nevertheless, Mastro is absolutely right to raise this question. In the future, hopefully more sources will come to light that will enable scholars to develop a better understanding of the decisions that produced the change in strategy in July 2014. And Mastro helpfully notes how one could fit the alternative account she proposes into my theoretical framework.

Elsewhere, Mastro raises two issues to which I would like to respond briefly. First, in the context of the debate within the PLA watching community, Mastro writes that I use "military doctrine, strategy, and the strategic guidelines interchangeably." Although the book does use the phrase military doctrine to refer to the international relations literature on military doctrine and innovation, it never uses "doctrine" or "military doctrine" as a synonym for strategy or the strategic guidelines in the China context. Moreover, on page 11, I explicitly discuss why I do not use the term doctrine in the book in this way. The book does use "strategy" and "strategic guidelines" interchangeably because, in a Chinese context, they do mean the same thing based on how the PLA defines the strategic guidelines (59). One important contribution I hope the book provides for the PLA-watching community is to show how the concept of the strategic guideline has been used by the PLA in how it thinks about military strategy. Second, Mastro writes that I claim on page 4 that past studies of the PLA have "overlooked" the role of the conduct of warfare in the international system. I was referring to the literature within international relations on military doctrine and innovation, however, and not to previous studies by PLA watchers. In fact, the book draws on many of the edited volumes from the annual PLA conference at the U.S. Army War College that Mastro includes in her review.

*Implications*

Turning to implications, Kaufman raises some excellent questions and points. To start, Kaufman notes that I omitted what she viewed as the book's most important contribution, "the story it tells about how authority operates and flows in a Party-army and a Party-state." Although I was not explicit as I should have been on this point, I could not agree more. Having spent more than a few years with the main protagonists in the story of the evolution of China's military strategy since 1949, I always viewed the party's role as a central one even though I did not set out to write a book about the party per se. This gets to the heart of what that means for the PLA to be party-army and how change occurs in the PLA.

Kaufman also asks, "how uniquely 'Chinese' is the PLA's approach to military reform?" A terrific question. My initial response is that in terms of the goals of reform, they are shaped by China's strategic circumstances, with the implication that another state facing similar circumstances might also pursue similar goals. One exception, of course, would be Mao's approach to strategy in 1964, which was decidedly a Chinese Communist approach, reprising some of the operational concepts used in the first three counter-encirclement campaigns in the 1930s. More generally, it is possible that China's circumstances have been unique, but the PLA's general approach to solving the problems it identifies would be similar to that of other militaries. In terms of the implementation of reform, certain aspects of the PLA's approach to reform may be unique because of the way in which the policymaking process inside the PLA overlaps with the party's own approach to decisionmaking (e.g., the role party committees, party congresses within units, and the like). For example, one key factor in the timing and implementation of PLA reforms is the five-year planning cycle, which determines how many resources are available and how they are allocated for the party-state as a whole, including the PLA. Similarly, major decisions are introduced at large meetings of relevant officials (e.g., a party congress or an enlarged meeting of the CMC) and then disseminated throughout the organization, often in speeches and not in published documents. Needless to say, more research that brings together experts of different militaries would be needed to answer this question satisfactorily. This also relates to another point Kaufman raises, that *Active Defense* is more about China's that it is about how states in general approach military strategy. Although I agree, it is also my hope that analyzing China's approach within the broader literature on military doctrine and innovation will open the door to more comparisons in the future.