

INDSR Newsletter



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Cooperation Outlook Between the U.S. National Guard and Taiwan Reserve Force

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Topics: National Defense Strategy, Concept of War

1. News Highlights

The U.S. has proposed that Taiwan join the National Guard-based cooperation program for Taiwan's armed forces to participate in joint training exercises.¹ The U.S. proposal is based on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (NDAA), passed by Congress in late 2021.² The bill requires the Department of Defense to submit a briefing to the congressional defense committees by February 15, 2022, on the feasibility of enhancing cooperation between the U.S. National Guard and Taiwan. Section 1249 of the Act specifies that the briefing will focus on: a. disaster

relief and emergency response; b. network defense and communications security; c. military medical cooperation; d. Chinese language education and cultural exchange; and e. planning for a program for the U.S. National Guard to assist in training Taiwan's reserve forces.³ It is evident that the U.S. National Guard should also cooperate with Taiwan's National Fire Agency of the Ministry of the Interior (disaster relief and emergency response), the National Information & Security Information Taskforce of the Executive Yuan (network defense and communication security), the standing Reserve Forces (military medical cooperation), the Ministry of Education

1. "Taiwan's Military, U.S. National Guard Look to Formalize Training Program," *Taiwan News*, January 3, 2022, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4396477>.

2. "S. 1605 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022," *Congress. GOV*, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1605/text>.

3. See the above note.

(Chinese language education and cultural exchange), and, most importantly, to assist Taiwan's reserve forces so they can become a reliable force in defense operations.

The U.S. military forces are composed of the Active Force and the Reserves Force. According to Title 10E of the U.S. Code, the Reserves Force is divided into two branches: the federal Reserves Force and the state National Guard.⁴ The federal Reserves Force include the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve. The state National Guard has only two units, the Army National Guard, and the Air National Guard. Members of both the federal Reserves Force and the state National Guard have their civilian jobs and return to their units for training only one weekend a month plus two weeks every year. As of 2022, the U.S. state National Guard has about 444,000 personnel, of which 336,000 are in the

Army, and 108,000 are in the Air Force.⁵ Every day, an average of 30,000 National Guard troops are deployed worldwide on federal missions, and 10,000 National Guard troops are on U.S. soil on federal or state orders.⁶ In this background, the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act this year requires the Department of Defense to submit an assessment of the cooperation between the state National Guard and Taiwan, with the following security implications:

2. Security Implications

2-1. Reducing risk of being seen as overt military exchanges between Taiwan and U.S.

In 1979, the government of the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan officially terminated diplomatic relations with the U.S. With the "One China" policy framework in place, Taiwan-U.S. military exchanges have always been a sensitive

4. "U.S. Code: Title 10," *Cornell Law School*, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/9>.

5. Erin Duffin, "Number of National Guard Members in the United States from FY 1995 to FY 2022," *Statista*, Jun 21, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/207392/national-guard-members-in-the-usa/>.

6. Joseph L. Lengyel, "2021 National Guard Bureau Posture Statement," *National Guard*, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/portals/31/Documents/PostureStatements/2021%20National%20Guard%20Bureau%20Posture%20Statement.pdf>.

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topic, even though Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen was interviewed by the U.S. media CNN last year (2021) and confirmed information about Taiwan-U.S. military exchanges.⁷ A few days later, Taiwan Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng stressed that the U.S. military personnel in Taiwan were only to assist in training rather than being stationed as troops, in his answer to legislators.⁸ Therefore, the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 only requires “local” National Guards to cooperate with Taiwan to reduce the risk of being seen as direct Taiwan-U.S. military exchanges. In addition, both the 2013 Hawaii National Guard Commander Major General Darry Wong⁹ and the 2017 Hawaii National Guard Vice Commander Brig. Gen. Kenneth S. Hara have visited Taiwan.¹⁰ In the 2019 Hawaii transit, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen was also accompanied by Major

General Arthur J. Logan, Commander of the Hawaii National Guard and Director of the Department of Civil Defense, to visit the Emergency Management Agency (EMA).¹¹ These are all open secrets, so the interactions (not stationing) between the U.S. National Guard and the Taiwan military should reduce the risk of the activities being seen as direct Taiwan-U.S. military exchanges.

2-2. Building a long-term partnership

After the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, the U.S. Department of State directed the National Guards to develop military cooperation and civilian exchanges with some countries (usually third-world ones) through the State Partnership Program (SPP) in accordance with foreign policy objectives to establish long-term

7. “The President Confirmed that the U.S. Military in Taiwan to Assist Training. Experts: Reminding China that Taiwan is Prepared,” *CNA*, October 28, 2021, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip/202110280137.aspx>

8. “Chiu Kuo-cheng: The U.S. Military Exchange is not Stationed in,” *UDN Online*, October 29, 2021, <https://udn.com/news/story/10930/5851365>

9. “The Ministry of National Defense’s 102nd Annual Policy Performance Report,” *Bulletin of the Legislative Yuan*, May 30, 2014, <https://ws.ndc.gov.tw>

10. “First in Trump Administration: U.S. Active-duty General Visited Taiwan Last Month,” *The Liberty Times*, September 4, 2017, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/focus/paper/1132359>

11. “President Tsai’s Diplomatic Breakthroughs: Meeting with U.S. Generals in Hawaii,” *CNA*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/201903280018.aspx>

partnerships with Eastern European countries. As a result, the SPP has become an essential security cooperation tool for U.S. engagement with other countries that promotes collaboration in all aspects of military and other affairs and encourages civilian exchanges.¹² Under Title 32 of the United States Code, a state National Guard has two roles. It is under the command of the state government in peacetime, and the federal government may assume jurisdiction in case of war or emergency according to the law.¹³ As a result, the commander of the state National Guard often serves in another role as Department of Defense adjutant general of the state. This year, the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act proposed that the state National Guards cooperate with Taiwan, probably taking advantage of the National Guards' dual identity and the purpose of establishing a long-term partnership with Taiwan following the Eastern European model.

2-3. Strengthening the effectiveness of “defense in depth”

The defense concept of Taiwan's armed forces is always based on the order of “air superiority,” “sea superiority,” and “anti-landing.” The operational plan of the military's ground standing units is also focused on pursuing “decisive victory at the shore” and “eliminating enemies at the beach” as the guideline for its combat preparation. However, Taiwan's terrain is long from north to south (394 km) and narrow from east to west (144 km at its widest); the crossing from east to west is blocked by the Central Mountain Range, which further limits the combat depth in the west side. Assuming that the landing PLA troops are not eliminated at the beach and do get ashore, it is Taiwan's reserve forces which will be mainly responsible for urban defenses and defense in depth. For this reason, the U.S. has been asking Taiwan to strengthen its reserve forces through different channels. For example, at the 2019 U.S.-Taiwan Defense Industry Conference, the U.S. suggested that Taiwan consider developing a “combat-capable reserve force.” In 2020, James F. Moriarty,

12. “State Partnership Program,” *National Guard*, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/leadership/joint-staff/j-5/international-affairs-division/state-partnership-program/>

13. “Title 32 - NATIONAL GUARD,” *United States Code*, 2011 Edition. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title32/html/USCODE-2011-title32.htm>.

Chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), called on Taiwan to increase its “reserve deterrent force.” The National Defense Authorization Act of 2022, passed in 2021, directly calls for the U.S. National Guards to assist Taiwan in strengthening its reserve forces. These efforts aim to enhance Taiwan’s defense depth to delay the PLA’s attempts to make a quick, decisive attack and reinforce the effectiveness of the “layered deterrence” of Taiwan’s military.¹⁴

3. Trend observation

3-1. Signing of “State Partnership Program”

The U.S. National Guards of different states have established 85 State Partnership Programs with 93 countries worldwide.¹⁵ The State Partnership Program is an exchange program between 54 U.S. states (including territories and

Washington, DC) and other countries; each state is usually responsible for conducting regular exchanges with the reserve or standing forces of more than one friendly country. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), primarily responsible for defense in the Asia-Pacific region, maintains State Partnership Programs with ten countries in the region. The State of Hawaii, for example, signed the programs with the Philippines in 2000 and Indonesia in 2006. Recently in 2019, Nepal established a State Partnership Program with the State of Utah.¹⁶

3-2. Deepening of the all-aspect engagement model

The State Partnership Program is not about U.S. soldiers training military personnel from other countries but about sharing concepts, ideas, and the experience learned. In other words, the Program provides not only military

14. “Evil Neighbor Next Door! Reserve Call-up Training Loses Badly to Singapore, Israel,” *The Liberty Times*, September 29, 2020, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/1402770>

15. “State Partnership Program,” *U.S. Department of State*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/>

16. “State Partnership Program,” *National Guard*, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/leadership/joint-staff/j-5/international-affairs-division/state-partnership-program/>

contact through the National Guards but also uses civilian identities and capacities to facilitate broader contacts across military, government, economic, and social sectors.¹⁷ Due to the uniqueness of the National Guard and its combination of military and civilian status, in addition to military exchanges with partner countries, it has extensive access to civilian security cooperation programs such as disaster preparedness and relief, humanitarian operations, civil support, NBC (nuclear, biological, and chemical) protection, cybersecurity, anti-narcotic, border/port security, and public/private partnerships.¹⁸ And, most importantly, to assist partner countries with reserve force reform. This year, the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act designated the state National Guards to evaluate cooperation with Taiwan, hoping that a long-term partnership can be established with Taiwan and expand from single points to comprehensive collaboration based on the existing foundation.

3-3. Strengthening Taiwan's "defense in depth" capability

The "defense in depth" concept covers "urban defenses," "mountain warfare," and "civilian resistance." During World War II, the Soviet Union established multiple layers of defensive zones within a depth of more than 300 kilometers west of Moscow, effectively preventing the German army from "blitzkrieg" offenses. On February 24, 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine began; Ukraine is 1,300 kilometers long from east to west (about nine times the depth of Taiwan). On March 29, Russia announced the withdrawal of troops sieging Kyiv for more than a month.¹⁹ The Russian force failed to occupy Kyiv after prolonged attempts, and its supply lines were too long and could be easily attacked. Meanwhile Ukraine borders EU countries in the west and has a constant provision of military supplies. This deepening of Ukraine's depth has effectively retarded Russia's blitzkrieg tactics. In comparison, Taiwan's western

17. See the above note.

18. "The State Partnership Program," *U.S. Embassy in The Czech Republic*, <https://cz.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/state-partnership-program-spp/>

19. Nathan Hodge, "Russia Says it will Reduce Military Operations Around Kyiv following Talks with Ukraine," *CNN*, March 29, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/29/europe/russia-reduce-assault-kyiv-plan-intl/index.html>.

region, blocked by the Central Mountain Range, has a combat depth of only about 80 kilometers, so strengthening Taiwan's "defense in depth" capability is a matter of great urgency. After the war broke out in Ukraine, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Mara Karlin told a Senate hearing on March 11 that Taiwan could learn from Ukraine's reform of its reserve forces (territorial defense forces) and their people's will to fight the enemy.²⁰ Her implication was that Taiwan must prepare to defend itself and that heaven will help those who help themselves. The U.S. National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 calls for an evaluation of the cooperation between the U.S. National Guards and Taiwan's reserve forces. With the Act, Taiwan's military is expected to reference Ukraine's experience and strengthen its reserve forces on the current foundation to perform "defense in depth" with mobilized civilians to defend its territory, making their "layered

deterrence" strategy more effective.

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(The contents and advice in the assessments are the personal opinions of the authors, and do not represent the position of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.)

20. "Taiwan must Enhance Defense: U.S.," *Taipei Times*, March 12, 2022, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2022/03/12/2003774629>.

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Comments on the Implementation of the PLA's "New Soldier System"

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Topic: PLA

1. News Highlights

The recently implemented reform of the PLA soldier system has been publicized by the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in a Q&A with reporters in the April 25, 2022, issue of the *PLA Daily*.¹ The laws and regulations amended in the reform of the soldier system announced by the CCP are mainly the "Provisional Regulations for Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs)" and the "Provisional Regulations for Compulsory Soldiers," complemented by the "Provisional Regulations for the

Management of the Career Development of NCOs," the "Provisional Regulations for the Retirement of Soldiers," the "Notice on Issues Related to the Transition of the Reform of the Soldier System," the "Provisional Regulations for the Recruitment of NCOs," the "Regulations on Conscription Work," and the "Regulations on the Resettlement of Retired Soldiers." These regulations include the assured improvement of compensation, retirement system, classification of NCOs, military training, service tenures, the transition from conscripts to NCOs, and the amendment of the military ranking system.² Despite the limited information released by the

1. "Strive to Create a New Soldier Team for the New Era," *PLA Daily*, April 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-04/25/content_314349.htm.

2. The voluntary military service of the PLA was formerly known as sergeants but was renamed to NCOs, with the lowest rank of corporal, after this amendment. In this article, they are generally referred to as NCOs.

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PLA, the reform of the soldier system may have an impact on the PLA's recruitment, the status of its soldiers, and even the quality of the troops and their ability to fight. Therefore, it is worth discussing further.

2. Security Implications

2-1. System reform aims to improve quality and quantity of voluntary soldiers

The CCP has its own set of official words about the meaning of this reform.³ At the structural level, the CCP's amended Military Service Law in 2021, changed from "a military service system

that combines compulsory and voluntary service as well as militia and reserve service" to "a military service system that combines voluntary service with compulsory service, with voluntary service as the backbone."⁴ In practice, due to a large number of draftees available in China, even for compulsory service, conscripts can first apply for voluntary enlisting after military service registration; the rest will be notified later if there are some unfilled positions. With the adjustment of the military service law, China has switched to a system consisting mainly of volunteers; as such, how to effectively improve the quality and quantity of volunteers has become the major concern of the soldier system

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3. The CCP believes that the primary significance of the soldier system reform is: 1. to carry out Xi Jinping's remarks on talents, such as encouraging college students to enlist and enhancing the professionalism of the PLA; 2. to accelerate the recruitment of talents and cultivate skilled military personnel for enhanced combat effectiveness; 3. to carry out the system design of recruitment, training, assessment, promotion, transfer, discharge, and benefits for the modernization of military personnel; 4. to change the management concept and methodologies that emphasize on fairness, justice, and optimism to enhance the quality of development and management. As Miao Hua, Director of the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission, said of "the great significance of the new soldier system," "... Enhancing the capability and quality of combat-ready soldiers, building an army of skilled artisanal talents, and strengthening the professional reliability of NCOs... To promote quality development of the troops." For more details, see "New Soldier System is Implemented for Mobilization Deployment in Beijing, Miao Hua Attends and Speaks," *PLA Daily*, April 27, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jw/2022-04/27/content_10151947.htm.
 4. The CCP military service system has evolved from a conscription system under the 1955 "Military Service Law" to a mixed system dominated by compulsory service in 1984. Later, it became a system combining compulsory and voluntary service in addition to a combined militia and reserve service under the 1998 amended "Military Service Law" (the section was not changed in the 2009 amendment). Over the years, there was a gradual transition from conscription to a primarily volunteer-based system.

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reform. In particular, the CCP recognizes the current problems of “career instability, insufficient professional expertise, and lack of a sense of professionalism” among low-rank soldiers.⁵ In response to the situation, the reform addresses the amendment of the military ranking system (see Table 1) and subjects such as distinguishing NCOs and those assigned to management duties, the extension of the service tenure, enlisting channel optimization, promotion, examination, guaranteed compensation, and resettlement after retirement have also been taken care of. These solutions all focus on increasing the incentives for talents with professional expertise to join the military and providing complete career planning and protection (shown in Table 2) to ease the above concerns.

1-2. CCP relaxed rules to alleviate shortage of professional soldiers

Although the PLA has long since

moved away from merely replenishing the troops, the “precision conscription” of the past few years may have been less effective than expected or still insufficient, leading the CCP to make adjustments to address the shortage of professional soldiers.⁶ For example, the regulation once stipulated that only university graduates joining the voluntary service could be promoted in advance, such as starting as a sergeant, according to their professional skills. In this reform, re-enlisted soldiers are also allowed to be promoted in advance according to their expertise.⁷ Also, a compulsory conscript can usually switch to voluntary after the two-year service. This reform especially relaxes the length allowed for compulsories turned volunteers. Conscripts with outstanding service records can be early promoted to sergeants within two years to increase the incentive for compulsory soldiers to switch to voluntary. In addition, the reform relaxes the standard of service

5. “Strive to Create a New Soldier Team for the New Era,” *PLA Daily*, April 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-04/25/content_314349.htm.

6. For the connotation of “precision conscription,” see Tzu-Chieh Hung, “Recent Changes in the PLA’s Recruitment Methods from the ‘Shandong Model’,” *National Defense and Security Weekly*, No. 18 (October 2018), pp. 1-4.

7. The PLA has a set of standards for soldiers’ professionalism. For example, junior, intermediate, and senior NCOs are required to possess entry-level, intermediate, and higher technician levels, respectively. The certificate of the relevant skill level is combined with the Chinese National Vocational Qualification Certificate.

extension for highly professional middle and senior NCOs (Staff Sergeant Second Class or above). It abolishes the "promotion or retirement" rule after four years of service in the rank. This change allows the middle and senior NCOs to continue service until the maximum number of years in the rank and still have the opportunity of promotion in the future. While this is ostensibly aimed at retaining soldiers with professional skills, in reality, such adjustments may be related to the impact of the CCP's implementation of the newly revised "Regulations on the Identification of Vocational Skills of Active-Duty Soldiers in the PLA" in 2017. The regulation combines the levels of professional certifications with promotion, resulting in the NCOs who cannot obtain a higher level of such certifications in time being excluded from promotions or even forced to discharge.⁸

3. Trend Observation

3-1. Hidden dangers in new soldier system

The CCP's "combining voluntary service with compulsory service, with voluntary service as the backbone" military system has the advantage of cultivating experienced, highly professional soldiers through voluntary service while increasing the personnel renewal rate and the number of reservists through the two-year compulsory service.⁹ Due to CCP's emphasis on voluntary service, the number of NCOs has continued to increase over the years. For example, the 2009 "Reform Plan for Deepening the Non-Commissioned Officer System" objective was to increase the number of NCOs from 800,000 to 900,000. As the proportion of PLA NCOs has long exceeded 50%, the junior NCOs have become the mainstay of combats.¹⁰ Therefore, for the volunteers in the PLA, the establishment of mid-level NCOs is relatively small, and it is difficult for junior NCOs to be promoted to mid-

8. "Authority Interview: All NCO Professions are Included in the Scope of Vocational Skill Certifications," *People's Daily Online*, April 14, 2017, <http://military.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2017/0414/c1011-29210456.html>.

9. Heming Wang, "Analysis of the Trend and Benefits of the Transformation of China's Military Service System," *Law and Society*, Vol. 13, June 2021, pp. 103-104.

10. Zhiming Deng, Minghe Wang, and Chenxiao He, "A Study of Methods to Enhance the Innovative Quality of NCOs Based on Orientation Training," *Military-to-civilian Conversion in China*, Vol. 15, August 2021, pp. 51-53.

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level ones. Due to the excessive turnover of NCOs from the high elimination rate, the 2009 "Reform Plan for Deepening the Non-Commissioned Officer System" changed the NCO ratio in the military structure to prevent unnecessary elimination. The reform changed the "promotion or retirement" rule for senior and mid-level NCOs and added the incentive for mid-level NCOs to receive monthly pensions. It will thus become more difficult for NCOs to be promoted to Staff Sergeant Second Class and high-level NCOs if the number of positions remains the same or is slightly increased.¹¹

The insufficient supply of NCO positions and the new system that allows "the establishment of priority promotion, early promotion and over-promotion system for NCOs" are causing difficulties in the promotions. There could be even dissatisfaction and personnel competition among the lower-rank NCOs if the promotion standard or implementation is less than fair and impartial. In addition, although the CCP has abolished the "promotion or retirement" rule for senior and middle-ranking NCOs and increased

the monthly pension for middle-ranking NCOs, the reform has only regulated the guaranteed compensation for soldiers in principle. That means the actual number of wages, allowances, medical treatment, and orphans' pensions are yet to be confirmed until the subsequent regulations are finalized. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether the increase in compensation can attract professionals to join the PLA for improved competitiveness.

3-2. Transition period before implementation of new system

The reform specifically mentions "general considerations for the transition of the reformed soldier system," which emphasizes the importance of: "maintaining a smooth transition through considerations of the changes in the old and new policies and systems, analyses of potential contradictions and policy risks, identification of the right balance in the transition, formulation of reasonable qualifications and conditions for job posts, setting adjustment policies for recognition of training history and service management, and shortening the

11. There is currently no information on the overall increase in the number of middle and senior NCOs, but only a few additions have been made.

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transition period as much as possible” along with “principally not to carried out a soldier’s transfer and handover before the completion of the transition.”¹² In other words, the PLA’s such planning is not yet complete. For example, the reform specifically mentions the distinction of NCOs into “management NCOs” and “skilled NCOs” concerning the compatibility of duties and their specialties. The meaning is to define in detail what professional skills are required for each rank and post and that no one can occupy the position without

obtaining a certificate of such professional skills. Except for some NCOs in certain positions who may not already have possessed the relevant certificates due to the new system, the adjustments are substantially connected with the NCOs’ benefits, such as the salary associated with the ranks of duties (professional skills). As the compensation details are yet to be completely established, although the new system has become effective as of March 31, 2022, it would still take some time before full implementation.

12. “Strive to Create a New Soldier Team for the New Era,” *PLA Daily*, April 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-04/25/content_314349.htm

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Table 1. Comparison of the PLA soldier ranks before and after the amendment

New System		Old System	
Compulsory Soldiers	Private	Compulsory Soldiers	Private
	Private First Class		Private First Class
Junior Sergeant	Corporal	Junior NCO	Corporal
	Sergeant		Sergeant
Mid-class NCO	Staff Sergeant Second Class	Mid-class NCO	Staff Sergeant
	Staff Sergeant First Class		Sergeant Major Fourth Class
Senior NCO	Sergeant Major Third Class	Senior NCO	Sergeant Major Third Class
	Sergeant Major Second Class		Sergeant Major Second Class
	Sergeant Major First Class		Sergeant Major Second Class

Source: compiled by Tzu-Chieh Hung from "Strive to Create a New Soldier Team for the New Era," *PLA Daily*, April 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-04/25/content_314349.htm.

Table 2. Highlights of the new soldier system adjustments

Items	Description
NCO Classification and Management System	First, according to the duties and responsibilities of the post and the nature of the work, NCOs are divided into two categories: management NCOs and skilled NCOs. Second, to improve the post establishment ranking system. The ranking of each post is differentiated, and the size and structure of the NCO staff are reasonably adjusted. Third, to establish a qualification system for assigning positions. Clarify the criteria for assignment based on the classification and management of NCOs and soldiers and achieve flexible unity between the needs of the positions and the selection of candidates.
Sources of new NCOs	The new selection system allows outstanding compulsory soldiers to be selected for early promotion to NCOs. In terms of local recruitment, there are three types of recruitment for NCOs: direct recruitment, targeted cultivation, and special recruitment through the set recruitment criteria. On the other hand, the military academies are exploring new ways of selecting and recruiting NCO cadets from high school graduates to expand the talent source and optimize the personnel quality.
Mechanism to discover outstanding NCO candidates	First, the new mechanism replaces the current model of training NCO cadets at a fixed pace and time. Continuing the existing practice that university graduate soldiers and enlisted NCOs can be assigned a higher rank, re-enlisted soldiers are also included. Second, the service tenure is extended for middle and senior NCOs. The new system appropriately extends the length of service of middle and senior NCOs with the flexible "4+X" service structure. Third, the promotion opportunities are increased. With the original "promotion or retirement" principle, the middle and senior NCOs have only one chance of promotion after four years of service; in the new system, they will be given promotion chances every year before reaching the maximum service tenure of their ranks. Fourth, a system for priority promotion, early promotion, and over-promotion of NCOs is established. NCOs who had combat experience, carried out major missions, received citations and commendations, and have excellent assessment results will be given higher priority for promotion.

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NCO Training System	The training of NCOs has been adjusted and optimized into three types: pre-selection training, promotion training, and in-service training. In the training of NCOs, a "dual certification" model is implemented, in which NCOs are required to obtain not only an academic diploma but also a vocational qualification certificate or a vocational skill level certificate. The training channels are broadened as well. NCO training is carried out in local colleges and universities, scientific research institutions, equipment production units, and other businesses to form a training model of in-depth military and civilian integration and complementary resources.
NCO Assessment System	First, the form of organizing assessments is optimized. The new system establishes an appraisal procedure with regular appraisals as the basis, annual appraisals as the focus, and selection appraisals as important supplements. Second, adjustment of the assessment criteria setting. The assessment content and evaluation criteria are refined and improved to form a measurable and well-controlled implementation specification. Third, the application of assessment results is emphasized. The appraisal is closely linked to the selection and promotion of NCOs, their training and assignment, rewards and punishments, as well as their retirement and placement.
Adjustment of the Compulsory System	The new system is updated with the conscript status definition, conditions of priority supplement, and mechanisms for early promotion to NCOs. The systems of early promotion, assignment, training and assessment, and retirement from active service have also been optimized. Soldiers with verifiable higher academic diplomas or technical skills qualifications will be given priority for assignment to enhance the personnel quality at the source. In terms of assignments, a two-way selection system has been established to assign new recruits to certain posts. For selection for promotion, the new system specifies the conditions for early promotion to the private rank.

Comments on the Implementation of the PLA's "New Soldier System"

System of Guaranteed Compensation for Soldiers	The two Regulations make it clear that soldiers are entitled to certain political, work, and living privileges in accordance with the law; and they also regulate, in principle, the wages and benefits, housing security, and medical insurance of NCOs in addition to allowances, healthcare, and pensions for conscripts. The specific privileges and security standards will be refined in the respective regulations.
Soldier Retirement and Placement System	The types of retirement are divided into expiring, regulated, and compulsory retirement. Based on expiring retirement, those not fit for further military service can retire in the year or at any time. A new way for NCOs to receive their monthly pension has been added. In addition to the four existing placement methods of job seeking, government-arranged work, retirement, and government support, a monthly retirement pension is added to the new system. Discharged junior NCOs can find jobs for themselves, middle-rank NCOs can opt for government-arranged employment and receive monthly benefits, while most senior NCOs just retire.

Source: compiled by Tzu-Chieh Hung from "Strive to Create a New Soldier Team for the New Era," *PLA Daily*, April 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-04/25/content_314349.htm.

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Double Impact on China's Food Security and Food Supply Crisis

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Keywords: COVID-19, Food Security

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, the global food supply and trade have been impacted tremendously. On the other hand, according to the statistics from Nomura Holdings, nearly 400 million people in 45 Chinese cities have entered full or partial lockdown as of mid-April under the CCP's dynamic clearing policy.¹ Although Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stressed the need to ensure a bumper harvest and stable supply of major agricultural products in maintaining social and price stability and protecting people's livelihoods during the State Council executive meeting on

April 20, the local governments continue to prioritize pandemic prevention and implement strict restrictions to control the pandemic, taking a toll on the economic development and food supply in China.

Food security is a strategic issue

According to the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, the amount of imported food hit a record high at 164.5 million tons, compared to the year-over-year 18.1% in 2020,² accounting for 24.1% out of the total food production of 682.85 million tons.³ China is the world's

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1. "Nearly 400 Million People in China under Full or Partial Lockdown Due to A Strict Zero-Covid Policy," *Business Insider*, April 19, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.in/international/news/nearly-400-million-people-in-china-under-full-or-partial-lockdown-due-to-a-strict-zero-covid-policy/articleshow/90927364.cms>.
 2. "The Table of Quantitative Values of Major Commodities Imported in December 2021 (RMB Value)," *General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China*, January 18, 2022.
 3. "Annual Changes in National Major Crop Production (million tons)," *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China*," <http://zdscxx.moa.gov.cn:8080/nyb/pc/index.jsp>.

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largest food importer, and its food import dependency ratio has increased to 19.4%. Divided by categories, the year-over-year growth of grain, mainly rice, wheat, and corn, is 82.9%, serving as the main driver for imported food growth, while the import growth of corn is 152.2% in the same period. Plus, China is the world's largest soybean importer, and its self-sufficiency rate is less than 15%.⁴

From the perspective of the food self-sufficiency rate, Du Ying, former deputy director of the National Development and Reform Commission, pointed out that China's food self-sufficiency rate dropped to 76.8% in 2020, and the ratio decreased by more than one percentage point every year over the past 20 years. The ratio decreased faster than in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. It is estimated China's food self-sufficiency rate will drop to

65% by 2035.⁵ Previously, the Rural Development Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published a report suggesting that by the end of 2025 (or the 14th five-year plan), China will face a food gap of about 130 million tons.⁶ China's food security has attracted increasing attention in the world.

Faced with increasing food imports and a decreasing food self-sufficiency rate, in April 2022, Xi Jinping pointed out in an article in the *Qiushi Journal*, "We have to seize the initiative in food security firmly. The amount of food is tactics, but food security is strategy."⁷ As early as at the CCP Central Economic Work Conference, the Central Rural Work Conference by the end of 2021, and the Two Sessions this year, Xi Jinping has reiterated the importance of food security. Facing extreme weather events, shortage

4. "Speeding up the Revitalization of the Soybean Industry," *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, March 29, 2022, http://www.moa.gov.cn/ztzl/ymksn/jjrbbd/202203/t20220329_6394563.htm.

5. Du Ying, "Du Ying: China must Keep Food Self-sufficiency Rate above 70%. It can't Continue to Decline," *The Paper*, January 13, 2022, https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_16255265.

6. Huang Jingzhe, "The Self-sufficiency Rate is under Increasing Pressure. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Food Gap will Reach 130 million Yons," *TechNews*, August 19, 2020, <https://technews.tw/2020/08/19/the-self-sufficiency-rate-is-under-increasing-pressure-and-the-chinese-academy-of-social-sciences-the-food-gap-will-reach-130-million-tons/>.

7. Xi Jinping, "Insisting on Solving the Three Rural Issues as the most Important Part of the Party's Work. The Whole Party and the Whole Society are to Promote the Revitalization of the Countryside," *www.qiushi.com*, March 31, 2022.

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of arable land and water resources, and natural disasters, the Chinese government has recognized threats to food production and security.

Double impact of the Russia-Ukraine war and COVID-19

As Russia and Ukraine both play a major role in global food markets, the war has disrupted the food supply chain. For China, Ukraine was its 6th largest food exporter in 2021 with the main exports to China being corn, wheat, and sunflower seed oil. China is the world's largest corn importer. In 2021, about 30 percent of Ukraine's corn exports went to China.⁸ Since the Russia-Ukraine war broke out, China has turned to the U.S. for 1.084 million tons of corn imports, the largest food import from the U.S. since May last year.⁹ Due to supply shortage, domestic corn prices in China remain high, and as corn is the main feed ingredient for pigs, the costs of pig farming have increased accordingly. Plus, the Russia-Ukraine war

has reduced the production of sunflower seed oil in Ukraine, pushing up the prices of substitute products such as soybean oil and increasing the import costs of China.

Second, it's already the spring sowing season, but as the local governments continue to implement strict COVID-19 prevention and control measures, many farmers can't return to their land to sow, impacting food production. Take Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces in Northeast China as an example. This is the main production area of corn, rice, and soybeans in China, and is known as the "granary of the world." According to statistics, the total food production of the Heilongjiang province in 2021 was 78.677 million tons, accounting for 11.5% of China's total food production. It's ranked first in food production volume, with Jilin ranked 5th and Liaoning 12th.¹⁰ However, the three provinces have entered lockdowns or closed management since February and March this year. The restrictions

8. "30% of China's Corn Imports Come from Ukraine. Short-term Prices Continue to Soar," *Central News Agency*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202202240236.aspx>.

9. "Under the Impact of Russia-Ukraine War, China Turns to the U.S. to Buy 1.08 Million Tons of Corn," *TechNews*, April 6, 2022, <https://technews.tw/2022/04/06/china-turns-to-u-s-for-corn/>.

10. Shao Haipeng, "Who is Farming for the Country? Heilongjiang Tops the List for 11 Consecutive Years. These Seven Provinces Produce Half of the Country's Grain," *The Paper*, December 10, 2021.

on personnel movement and logistics have impacted the production plan for spring plowing. Although the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China has announced in March farmers should go into spring plowing and secure the spring crop sowing area, the strict requirements for PCR tests, interruption of inter-provincial logistics and transportation, and high freight costs have hampered farmers' spring plowing.

Global food prices continue to rise. China's food supply will face increasing pressure later this year.

The Russia-Ukraine war has disrupted global food production and trade. As Russia is the world's largest exporter of fertilizers, the decrease in food production and the soaring prices of fertilizers all lead to increasing global food prices. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the FAO Food Price Index (FFPI) averaged 159.3 points in March 2022, reaching the highest level since 1990.¹¹ Given the current international

situation, global food prices are expected to rise.

At the international level, despite the rising global food prices, China has stored enough food by the end of 2021, and along with the government's policy to ensure commodity supply and price stability, the Chinese food prices in the first season of 2022 only rose by 1.7% on a year-over-year basis. In March, the year-over-year Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 1.5%. These show that Chinese food prices haven't been soaring and currently China does not have a food security problem. However, as the global food supply becomes strained and the international prices of soybeans, corn, and fertilizers keep soaring, it is expected the market prices of these products will remain high in the Chinese domestic market, putting more pressure on the pig farming industry. At the national level, since the planting area of spring plowing takes up more than half of the annual production, the delay in spring plowing is going to impact China's food production this year, reducing the production of spring crops such as rice and corn. Furthermore, as long as the

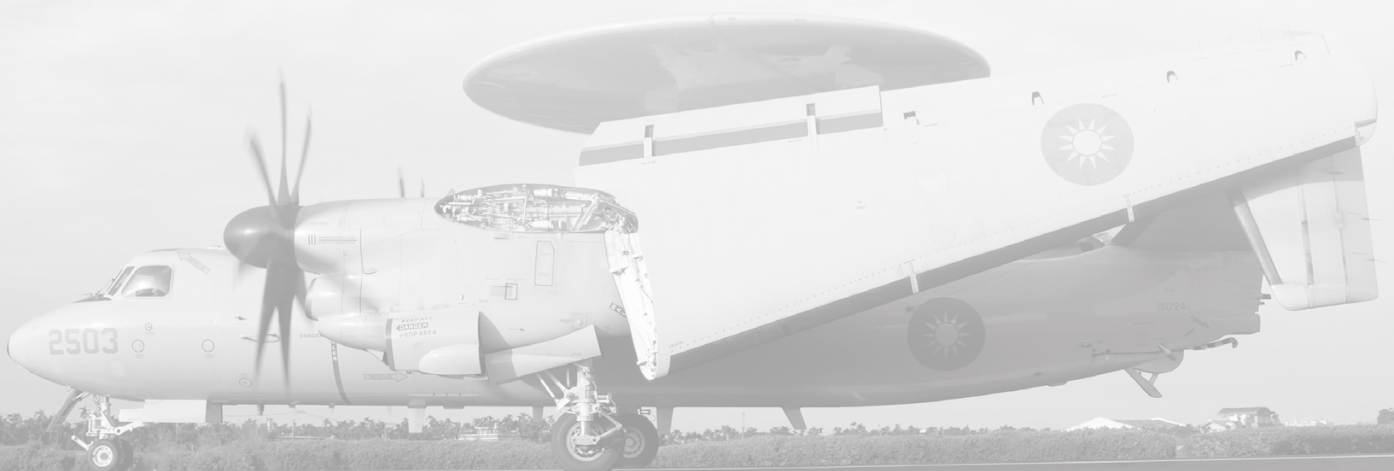
11. "The FAO Food Price Index Makes a Giant Leap to Another All-time High in March," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, April 8, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>.

CCP's dynamic clearing policy remains, we can predict the local governments will not easily let go of pandemic restrictions, which may impact the delivery of produce and raw materials in the country, and even summer plowing later this year. From this point of view, the duration of China's Covid prevention and control measures will impact and put more strain on the Chinese food supply later this year.

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Immersive Communist Propaganda in Murder Mystery Games

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Keywords: Murder mystery game, Censorship, Communist propaganda

“Murder mystery game” or “mysteries of murder” (referred to as “MMG” thereafter) is a variety of Live-action Role Playing Games (LRPG) that originated in the West. The game can be played online or offline, in which each player plays a role through studying the script, searching for evidence, and discussing with others to solve the puzzle in the context. The games can be played with many different contents and in various ways. Due to the popularity of TV variety shows such as Hunan Satellite TV’s “Star Detectives” and iQIYI’s “Mystery Game Sharks” in recent years, the CCP’s aggressive crackdown on online games and its strict restrictions on Chinese citizens’ outbound travel under the pandemic, offline MMG has become one of

the most popular activities among China’s Generation Z (Gen Z). However, it has also attracted attention from the authorities.

On April 1, 2022, five Chinese government agencies, including the ministries for culture, tourism and public security, issued an announcement to regulate immersive interactive games such as MMG and room escape games and planned to draft the “Notice on Regulating Business Activities of Script Entertainment (Soliciting Comments),” which intends to regulate the relevant industries by focusing on aspects such as case management, content management and banning minors from playing on weekdays.¹ The notice is the first nationwide management system for MMG

1. “The Ministry of Culture and Tourism on the ‘Notice of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the Ministry of Emergency Management, and the General Administration of Market Regulation on the Regulation of Script Entertainment Business Activities (Draft Request for Comments),’ ” *Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China*, April 1, 2022, https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/scgl/202204/t20220401_932252.html.

and room escape games in China, showing that the immersive game industry has entered a period from “free development” to a “strict control”.

On the other hand, Chinese officials have also taken advantage of the youthful and story-based characteristics of MMG to launch “anti-fraud MMG” and “red MMG.” For example, on April 27, 2022, the Beijing Haidian District Anti-Fraud Center and Haidian Police Station announced the launch of an anti-telecom fraud MMG in cooperation with Renmin University of China and Tianhuo Tongren, which was distributed to 97 colleges and universities in Beijing.² This article discusses the rapid growth and current status of MMG in China and looks at the changing attitudes and actions of the Beijing authorities towards MMG.

Explosive growth of MMG prompts regulatory noose

According to a forecast by China’s Insight & Info Consulting, the market size

of MMG in China will exceed RMB20 billion in 2022,³ with most of the MMG stores concentrated in China’s first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Wuhan. A report from the Chinese enterprise credit agency QCC.com shows that there were 5,957 newly registered MMG enterprises in China in 2021, an 85% increase over the same period in 2020. In the meantime, MMG has also become a powerful tool for cities to promote cultural tourism with products using Augmented Reality (AR) technology to provide visitors with an immersive experience.

The explosive development of the MMG industry has attracted the attention of Chinese officials. Initially, official Chinese media praised MMG as a way to foster patriotism among young people. Still, in September 2021, the Xinhua News Agency changed its attitude and posted a commentary saying that “MMG operators promote violence and superstition as a commercial gimmick

2. “Police-led Anti-fraud MMG Launched in Beijing for Players to Enjoy ‘Immersive’ Experience of Six Fraudulent Schemes,” *People’s Daily Online*, April 27, 2022, <http://finance.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0427/c1004-32410217.html>.

3. “Chinese MMG Market Development In-depth Study and Investment Trend Forecast Report (2022-2029),” *Selected Research Reports*, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/460393169>.

to attract young people, causing public worries.”⁴ In 2022, Shanghai officially promulgated the “Shanghai Temporary Regulations on the Management of Room Escape and MMG Content,” becoming the first city in China to include the two genres in its management. Later, Liaoning Province, Tianjin City, and Fujian Province also released similar local regulations. Most such regulations strictly forbid the promotion of violence and pornography, and the authorities require operators to self-examine the script so as not to violate the “Protection of Minors Law of the People’s Republic of China” and “Entertainment Venue Management Ordinance” and other relevant laws and regulations. The change in the attitude of official media and the regional content regulations show that Beijing authorities still strictly control the contents and accept only the values approved by the CCP; they are concerned that such activities would encourage young people to think, imagine, and even question.

CCP officials use MMG for “red propaganda”

Although Beijing authorities appear to be tightly controlling the development of MMG, since the immersive experience of the games appeals to young Chinese people, the officials can edit the scripts and stories to incorporate content that meets the interests and values of the CCP. In recent years, more and more official units or organizations, such as the Communist Youth League, have introduced MMG for red propaganda. There are the aforementioned Haidian Police Station “anti-fraud MMG” and the thematic red MMG “Red Plum in Flames.” The latter was produced by the Youth Work Committee of Zigong City Central Court in Sichuan Province at the “Red Education Base of Sister Jiang’s Hometown,” which commemorates Jiang Zhuyun, a female martyr of the CCP, for example. Many student groups also use MMG to produce “red propaganda.” As reported in Zhejiang News on May 11, 2022, Li Changzhou, the founder of the “Red Lecture Team” of Ningbo Finance and Economics College in his 20’s, used the MMG form to deliver an immersive experience of the revolutionary history of

4. “Xinhua News Agency: MMGs that Promote Violence, Superstition, and Bad Taste Caused Concern,” *Xinhua News Agency*, September 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3NcTmCC>.

the CCP to the audience.⁵ The *People's Daily* also published an article praising the “red MMG,” saying that it could bring better results to the education of CCP history and patriotism.⁶

On May 10, 2022, “Deer World,” the MMG creation and distribution platform from Chengdu City’s Rui Lian Technology, announced that it had received over RMB10 million in seed round financing. The investment will be used mainly for new product development and the application of script games in addition to public security and communist education.⁷ Although the company has not disclosed any specific investor, it is not difficult to imagine that it could be connected to the Chinese government. On May 20, the English versions of the melodramatic plays “Pioneer,” “Dumpling,” and “Rise” produced by Beijing Thirty-Three Days Culture Technology Company appeared on Amazon.com. The phenomenon shows that Beijing is not officially

opposed to MMG activities but that, as with any online and offline activity in China, they must be firmly controlled by the government and conform to so-called “positive values”. It is conceivable that in the future, “red MMG,” with the combination of official funding and commercial scripts, will become a useful tool for the CCP to promote patriotic education and the communist theme. It may even become a new genre for China’s cultural export to foreign countries.

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5. “Telling the Red Story and Carrying on the Red Gene, Young People Joined Zhejiang’s ‘Red Lecture Team’ ,” *Zhejiang News*, May 11, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3PsGES7>.
 6. “Immersive Patriotic Educative ‘Red MMG’ Welcomed,” *People's Daily*, May 6, 2022, <http://yn.people.com.cn/n2/2022/0506/c399415-35255213.html>.
 7. “MMG brand ‘Deer World Script Factory’ Received Nearly 10 million RMB Seed Investment,” *Sina Technology*, May 10, 2022, <https://finance.sina.com.cn/tech/2022-05-10/doc-imcwipii9088678.shtml>.



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