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Political Science 375: Contemporary Chinese Politics
Bibliographic Essay

Modern Chinese Intelligence Collection and Military Development

Analyzing intelligence collection capabilities is a tricky process. One of the more important factors for the intelligence agency in determining the value of any piece of information is whether anyone knows whether you know said information. Therefore, even in the most transparent governments, a shadowy and secretive intelligence organization is an inevitability. The military often follows suit, keeping technology secret as long as possible and logistical operations secret at least until completion. China does not have the most transparent government, making available information concerning its intelligence agencies both scarce and difficult to verify. Such information does, however, exist.

The vast majority of texts regarding China's "spy service" are superficial articles published for mid-level readership blogs, local newspapers with bored editors, and sources growing from there all the way up to the front page of the British Broadcasting Company's International News front page. Chinese and Post-soviet Russian spies are a common fallback story to fill space between major world tragedies. These many articles are largely devoid of content, save a few choice facts about current Asian politics. Where, then, should we direct our attentions for scholarly research of the Chinese secret service?

A good start for the study of any intelligence service is Schulsky's and Abrams' Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence. This text does a magnificent job of breaking the operational methods of all intelligence collection agencies into generalities adhered to by all intelligence collection agencies. However, it fails in two respects. First, despite seeking to make an academic

approach, the book tends to spend far more time discussing the sexier parts of intelligence collection (Human Intelligence, Covert Action), than the technical intelligence, which tends to be the far richer source of valuable information. I can appreciate the inevitability of this problem, with the clever tricks of an Intelligence Officer being perfectly comprehensible albeit completely secret. Information concerning technical intelligence at more than a superficial level may be inaccessible to the less tech-savvy audience.

The second great failure of Silent Warfare comes in its generalizations. While the operational methods described are indeed likely practiced by every intelligence agency in the world, it fails to highlight the governments that first perfected these techniques. The notable exception to this rule is the frequent referencing of cases directly involving the United States. The authors were careful to provide a disclaimer before the content of the book explaining that this book would inevitably have a western bias, because western democracies are the only governments open enough to provide the appropriately required access to information concerning intelligence agencies operational methodologies and histories. While this is a logical, foreseeable pitfall, the book makes case references involving the United States so frequently in the text that their failure to attend to any other country's history comes across as simple laziness in research.

In terms of specifically Chinese works concerning the collection of information, technical manuals akin to US field or operational manuals are nearly impossible to procure. After all, the CIA has been trying largely fruitlessly for years. The Chinese, however, can claim to be the originators of written intelligence theory, with one of the oldest discussions on the topic in existence in Sun Tzu's military classic The Art of War. The bulk of Sun Tzu's insight is a description of the "Divine

Skein,” a list of five types of secret agents under the employ of a wise general. The five represent operational methods still valid to the practice. “Native” agents correspond to simple collection officers. “Inside” agents are what modern intelligence scholars would simply call agents, those with internal access to state secrets and agree to work under the employ of an adversary. “Doubled” agents are exactly the same term in both Sun Tzu’s and modern context. “Expendable” agents for Sun Tzu represent a far more complex concept in modern intelligence: counterintelligence. “Expendable” for Sun Tzu meant that an agent would be given seemingly important piece of information in a context so as to make him/her believe it to be undoubtedly true, and then place the agent in a position so as to reveal this actually false information to an adversary, which the adversary would act on accordingly, allowing the originator of the lie to engineer a trap for the adversary. This is in practice a very rudimentary counterintelligence ploy, and a field of study Sun Tzu could never have realized the full potential of. The fifth and final term, “living” agent, is a strange sort of reward title for any agent who accomplishes whatever tasks of the other four fields and lives to tell the story.

While The Art of War has been an instrumental document in the shaping of military policy for the China, the orient and the wider world, the book gives very little insight about the modern collection capacities. Our attentions are better suited, therefore, for the more modern sources. The journal *Foreign Affairs* provides a good platform for inquiry into all topics concerning China. For example, the Bates and Kleiber article entitled “China’s Space Odyssey: What the Antisatellite Test Reveals About Decision-Making in Beijing.” The article discusses the possibility of the anti-satellite missile test launch in mid-2007 being a rogue action of the Peoples’ Liberation Army. Whether Beijing has appropriate control over the military, I don’t

think there is a strong enough argument to conclude either way. Either way, the test caught the special attention of the United States, prompting a condemnation for the technology as a danger “to all space-fairing nations.”

The United States ironically overlooked in context the fact that China is seeking to increase the number of “space-fairing” nations, both with its own space program and by launching commercial satellites for other nations even less-developed than China. One such was a communications satellite for Nigeria in May of 2007. That satellite was actually only the first of some thirty bids China has won for satellite launching contracts. And while no satellite has ever been used as a launching point for an act of aggression, they have a dark stigma in being both an opportune platform for attacks, and likely used as much for spying as for civilian communications.

The response to the Nigerian satellite launch was also less than favourable in the west (though it certainly didn’t garner the backlash associated with the the anti-satellite missile test.) Western pundits were quick to join in with the trendy activity in occidental diplomatic circles at the moment of criticizing China for seeking economic interaction with many nations regarded as “third-world,” “failed-state,” and often even “terrorist-harboring.” The Chinese are not, however, without their response: the very states affixing these labels were often the cause of the conditions that prompt the titles. European imperialism, for example, invited all kinds of societal decay in Africa, little to none of which has been resolved today. This is a deep slice to the Western mentality (for those who aren’t too stubborn to acknowledge that there is some substantial degree of truth behind the accusation). However, this common comeback does not rectify to occidental audiences the probability that Chinese investments could feasibly fund terrorist activity in Europe or America.

The United States Department of Defense 2007 Report on the Chinese Military faded quickly from the attention of the international sections of most news agencies, and thus escaped the attention of most of the public. While it doesn't relate explicitly to intelligence collection operation, the document raises some interesting concerns for United States Foreign Policy. The report, while concentrating on reviewing the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) technological developments and acquisitions of foreign conventional weaponry, does not neglect the threat China also poses in non-conventional theatres of operations, such as outer-space as aforementioned or cyber-space. Interestingly, the Chinese were implicated shortly thereafter in a cyber-raid attack against the Pentagon. The British Broadcasting Corporation's international website restricted the content of the article to known facts, of which there were regrettably few. While this is in good journalistic taste, the lack of speculative content severely limited the available content for the article. The article did explicitly say "the US and Chinese military regularly probe each other's networks, but the scale of disruption in the recent attack has raised concern," revealing that cyber warfare is already a priority for the national defense of both the US and China.

The primary concerns of warfare, however, are still surface bound (and air- and submarine-space). In order to increase its military formidability, the PLA has been "vamping up" accordingly. In 2007, the United States Department of Defense reported the initial threat status of a new Chinese class of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, which were expected to reach Initial Operational Status before the end of that year ("if [they] have not already done so."). Their sea, ground and air forces are all being slowly upgraded with modern military technology.

Why does the Defense department worry about these Chinese developments? China's own National Defense Report for 2006 insists "China pursues a road of peaceful development, and endeavours to build, together with other countries, a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity." The 2007 Department of Defense Reports on the Chinese Military praises these publications for helping to make the PLA more transparent. This gesture of goodwill, however, does not quell the American military, which is becoming increasingly more anxious about China. The Defense Department Report quotes the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Report that China "has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages." Part of the reason China deserves such a suspicious eye from America is obvious to anyone who cares to read the Department of Defense report. Most of the mobilizations highlighted regard Taiwan, and a later section even outlines every seemingly viable tactical option for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to act militarily against Taiwan. Needless to say the Chinese media was quick to insist that this was nonsense. Nonsense or not, United States concern over Taiwan is clearly greater than any other present international argument Beijing makes, though China has several other unresolved border disputes.

The Department of Defense report, however, fails to reflect the views and concerns of the American public, as suggested by lack of media attention. Were the Chinese mobilizations an immediate threat to Western individuals (the way toxic Chinese products are), then media coverage and subsequently public attention would snap to the Far East. That does not mean, however, that armed conflict would be a popular choice. With the catastrophic United States performance in the

Middle East, most Americans are disenchanted with the prospect of military intervention (evidenced by the results of the 2006 midterm elections). Jisi Wang, author of “China’s Search for Stability with America” would likely agree with me in saying that any mobilizations by the PLA are more hot air than anything else, contrary to the suggestions of Bates and Kleiber. Without an initial attack, it is unlikely the public could be motivated to support military action anywhere, particularly with respect to an issue as complicated as Taiwan. That is not to say that it is not possible to open the Taiwan issue to an American audience. A strong review of the Taiwan issue comes from John Garver’s book Face off: China, the United States and Taiwan’s Democratization. The information of the book is all ultimately leading up to a through the Sino-US tensions set off by Taiwan’s 1996 elections. Garver presents his information in a highly accessible way, simplifying the complexity of the ambiguity over Taiwan’s absent sovereignty to the point of accessibility to those who know nothing of the history surrounding the region.

After all of this, we are still left with the nagging question, “Who handles the spying in China?” The US government takes great interest in this same question, and so saw fit to answer it in the 2007 Intelligence Threat Handbook. The handbook presents information concerning the operational intelligence bureaucracies of the four states the Defense Department identifies as the biggest threat to American secrets (the four being China, Russia, Cuba, and North Korea). As with many government documents, its organizational format is lacking for civilian accessibility, but the Intelligence Threat Handbook is the most comprehensive unclassified government document concerning the modus operandi of foreign intelligence agents. It also spends a fair amount of discussion on the data security procedures necessary for assuring reasonable protection from Chinese cyber attacks.

All of this finally brings me to the definitive work. Where all of the previous works provided a fraction of the picture of Chinese Intelligence and Military services, Nicholas Eftimiades' Chinese Intelligence Operations is unquestionably the definitive and complete breakdown of how intelligence works in China. Eftimiades based his book on thousands of hours of research, untold numbers of interviews and readings. Early in his text, Eftimiades briefly outlines his rigorous standards for verifying the information he found with redundant reporting by unrelated sources. This indicates a far more hands-on research process than any of the other works I've analyzed.

His breakdown of the bureaucratic agencies confirms the breakdown given by the Department of Defense Intelligence Threat Handbook. But Eftimiades gives a far fuller and more accessible picture of the actually goings-on of these agencies, punctuating his discussions of their operational methods with references to known, confirmable stories (for example, the Larry Wu-Tai Chin case). Of all the research available, this compendium is comprehensive enough to summarize all of it.

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