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THE CHINESE COMMUNIST ARMY IN ACTION:  
THE KOREAN WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

by Alexander L. George  
Columbia University Press, New York, 1967

and

THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY

by Samuel B. Griffith II  
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As of mid-1967, it is becoming increasingly evident that the People's Liberation Army may well hold the key to the future of China. Thus the time is more than opportune for the publication of studies on the Chinese military.

Dr. George's analysis, based on a report to the Air Force in mid-1952, but revised and updated as of 1966, is a major contribution not only to our understanding of the PLA during the Korean War but also to the field of military sociology and the methodology of interviewing

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This review was prepared for publication in The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science

prisoners of war. Noting that Chinese Communist insistence on "man-over-weapons" is no empty slogan, the author examines the factors that motivated the Chinese soldiers and enabled them to fight so well in the early phases of the Korean campaign, and the forces that eroded Chinese fighting capabilities in the spring of 1951.

Reflection on Dr. George's part found the concept of "morale" too limited, needing to be replaced by the more inclusive theory of organizational behavior. Through approximately 300 interviews of Chinese prisoners of war captured from late March to early May 1951, the author provides the only "inside" analysis to date of the complex political organization imposed upon the PLA.

Key to the politicalization of the PLA were the role of the company political officer -- whose performance varied considerably; the "3-by-3" organization of squads -- the means of ensuring control even at the lowest level; the criticism meetings and the morale informant system which were generally resented by the rank-and-file; the dual political-military leadership in combat units which, contrary to Western assumptions, was not as divisive as generally believed; and the motivation and indoctrination of personnel.

The weaknesses of the system became evident when the promise of quick victory was disproved by events in March-April 1951. Loss of confidence in the applicability of PLA military doctrine, recognition of weapons inferiority, the weight of enemy fire and air power were among the critical factors leading to the erosion of Chinese morale. While Dr. George reminds the reader that it was remarkable

that "the PLA's control devices should succeed as well as they did in maintaining cohesion within units and extracting performance of combat duties," he concludes that the inability of Chinese combat morale to withstand indefinitely the strains of a prolonged war outside China's borders entailing high sacrifices was a lesson not lost on China's military leaders.

General Griffith's study is a useful introduction to the history of the PLA for the layman or the undergraduate. It vividly traces the development of the PLA from the Nanch'ang insurrection through the Korean War to the period of modernization, with an epilogue on the cultural revolution as of January 1967.

The specialist would have preferred greater attention to such questions as Mao's effort to gain control of the military in the early thirties, the evolution of the Military Affairs Committee, its relation to the People's Revolutionary Military Council, and after 1954 to the Ministry of National Defense.

The author's conclusions that "for the foreseeable future China will probably pursue an indirect strategy" and "her actions will be dictated by a prudent appreciation of her vulnerability" are eminently reasonable. While China is likely to accelerate her material aid to Vietnam, she will seek to avoid direct intervention. Any North Korean initiation of hostilities will not be encouraged. Peking is aware it cannot take Taiwan by force. Nor is war with the Soviet Union in the offing. However, in the Himalayan arc offensive action for limited political purposes cannot be ruled out. Although China's "nuclear

doctrine" to date has only been expressed in defensive terms, Griffith suggests that with the improvement of the PLA's offensive capabilities corresponding changes in Chinese strategic and doctrinal concepts may take place -- a development it is hoped he will explore further.