

Dates of Meeting:

7-12-1953 – 26-1-1954

Type of Meeting:

Meeting on the PLA

Place of Meeting:

Zhongnanhai, Beijing

Attendance:

123 participants: PLA commanders, CMC standing members, academy presidents. Zhu, Peng, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Liu Bocheng, Nie Rongzhen, He Long, Su Yu, (Deng Xiaoping is not present)

Peng chairs

Major Agenda Items:

Modernization of PLA

On the agenda was to reach a consensus among PLA leaders on the single-responsibility system.

Speeches/Reports:

Su Yu summarizes the lessons of the war

Peng Dehuai: "China's Military Experience in the Past Four Years and the Fundamental Issues for Our Future Military Development" December 1953

silenced any dissenting opinions and signaled the beginning of Soviet style military reform. The meeting set new principles for the PLA's modernization over the next decade by agreeing that the Chinese must learn advanced military science and technology from the Soviets.

He pointed out that 'the war to resist US aggression and aid Korea was an important challenge to our army . . . its importance lies in the fact that we must raise the military art of our armed forces to a new level'

He identified several obstacles to modernization that "cannot be ignored." The first obstacle was a poor understanding of modern warfare and insufficient recognition of the changes that would be required to transform the PLA. Peng critiqued "some comrades" who viewed modernization simply as adding new equipment, such as tanks or planes, without major organizational change. Instead, Peng viewed the changes as a shift "from only infantry to the coordination of various branches and services, from backwards weapons and equipment to modern equipment, from dispersed operations to centralized modern standardized operations." Peng stressed that these changes constituted "a big leap forward. It is a change in essence, not just simply an increase in quantity."

The second obstacle concerned the PLA's organizational deficiencies. Peng noted that the PLA's "organization, personnel and systems . . . were not suited to the demands of building a modern military." A core problem was the decentralization of command during the civil war, where individual units used different kinds of weapons and adopted their own organizational practices regarding training, discipline, and so forth. Coordination among units from different areas was rare. Again, Peng criticized "some comrades" who "still lack sufficient understanding that the more modern a military is, the higher the demand for centralization and close cooperation." Overstaffed and redundant organizations also hindered improving coordination and standardization.

Deng Hua: 'since we beat the highly modernized invading forces led by US imperialists with [our] inferior equipment, [our] experience in the Korean War is evidently valuable and realistic.' To him, it was urgent and imperative that the Chinese forces should enhance the People's Liberation Army's capacity to fight anti-amphibious, anti-airborne, and anti-nuclear warfare.

Deng explained: 'We must study hard to catch up and master modern military technology so that [we] will be able to reduce the advantages of enemy's technology and equipment.'

Other Decisions and/or Actions:

- PLA must learn advanced military science and technology from the soviets. In examining the Korean lessons, the Chinese military commanders seemed to have firmly believed that advanced - technology was as important as manpower in modern wars.
- This conference passed the "Regulations of PLA Political Work," which abandoned the single-responsibility system and resumed the party's control over the PLA at all levels. In addition, the CMC decided to resume the old system on the basis of the principle of "individual responsibility of the leaders under the collective leadership of the Party committee."
- develop its own industrial base and, especially, heavy industries. Reducing defense spending and reducing the force to 3.5 million would free up resources for the nation's industrial development.

- to halt the growth of the services and combat arms and instead focus on increasing the quality of the existing forces
- to emphasize formal training and especially the training of officers. Training officers was described as “the core of the core of building a modernized force.
- using “formal standards in all aspects of the army” to overcome the decentralization of command and organization from the civil war. Perhaps most important, standardization was necessary for “meeting the requirements for unified command and coordinated action in modern warfare,” or how the PLA would need to fight in the future. Other elements of standardization included unified systems, organization, training, and discipline.
- The conference also determined the responsibilities and organization of the military regions, military districts, and military subdistricts along with the leading bodies of the services and branches and the authorized strength of operational units.
- to strengthen the role of headquarters and other command units. Headquarters were deemed to be the body for organizing modern warfare and commanding the campaigns and battles of an integrated force with various services and branches.
- the CMC decided in late 1954 to establish twelve military regions, replacing a more cumbersome system of management and command from the civil war.

Remarks:

1. In early 1954, Deng Hua wrote a lengthy report on ‘principles and guidelines of combat operations’ in Korea. ‘My general observation . . . is,’ he maintained, “that although nature of war and the army’s political quality will still play a decisive role in modern warfare, [our army’s] sources of military materiel and technological conditions will be indispensable factors.
2. After the CMC gave up the single-responsibility system, the Soviet model faced criticism and challenges. There was also increasing criticism of excessive reliance on Soviet practices.
3. Most sources only mention the debate without describing the details; however, other sources give some clues about the contentious issues and debates in the PLA leadership. One such source was Marshal Luo Ronghuan, director of the General Political Department, who not only opposed the Soviet model of the single-responsibility system but also directly confronted Soviet advisers about the issue. In addition, this conference came after Luo had convinced Peng Dehuai to support the opposition against the Soviet single-responsibility system in the summer of 1953. Guo Xuezhi (2012). *China’s Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics*. Page 202
4. Most of this information is from Fravel **M. Taylor (2019). *Active Defense China’s Military Strategy since 1949***