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The Chinese army urged to boost its combat readiness

The official newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA Daily) has announced that training intensification and preparation for war will be amongst the top priorities for China's military in 2019.

In its New Year's Day editorial, the newspaper underscored the need to "be well prepared for all directions of military struggle and comprehensively improve troops' combat response in emergencies [...] to ensure we can meet the challenge and win when there is a situation."

President Xi Jinping, who as chairman of the Central Military Commission is also head of China's armed forces, has stressed such priority several times since he took office in late 2012, a disposition which has been interpreted as a mere flexing of the military muscle.

However, the fact that the incitement occurred for the first time at the beginning of the year seems to suggest that it could reflect a concrete plan to boost PLA's combat readiness.

In due time special inspectors will be sent among the units in order to strengthen the training and the combat readiness by an effective control network. The specific tasks will be: correct bad combat training practices against detailed templates, identifying discipline violation during the training, respecting clear and detailed training supervision standards, fighting cheat, waste and bureaucracy. Inspectors will be accountable for their mistakes and possible negligence.

An essential aspect of training, apart from the rhetorical opposition between training as founding value versus hardware, is the "the development of an intelligent military," the literal translation of "intelligentisation". China is following a drive very similar to the one through which several NATO and NATO-partner armies are undergoing i.e. not only developing and deploying information-rich platforms towards the lowest echelons but training what has been defined as "strategic corporals" in the late-nineties by USMC general Charles Krulak. This aspect is particularly complex to be reconciled with typical Communist ideological training, stressing uniformity, orthodoxy and obedience, but it is not impossible that, within an ideologically totalitarian system, remarkable degrees of tactical and operational flexibility

can be achieved through extensive mission-type tactics (Auftragstaktik, first extensively applied by Germans).

Meanwhile, at least 38 senior colonels were promoted to the rank of major general in late December, nine of whom were from the PLA's ground forces, four from the air force, three were from the rocket force and 22 from the People's Armed Police Force.

The military has undergone major upheaval and reform during the past six years, with dozens of generals brought down amid an unprecedented anti-corruption campaign.

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