



TAMKANG JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Volume 29 Number 2 January 2026

Research Article

- **Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective**

Ying-Yu Lin

- **A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence:
India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication**

Ren-Shan Jia, Tung-Chieh Tsai

- **Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a Globalized Context—A Comparative Study of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games**

Jen-Shin Yang

January 2026

TAMKANG JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

PUBLISHER

Huan-Chao Keh

Tamkang University, ROC (TAIWAN)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Archie Brown

University of Oxford, UK

Avery Goldstein

University of Pennsylvania, USA

Chung-Hung Cho

Tamkang University, ROC (TAIWAN)

Eric M.P. Chiu

National Chung Hsing University, ROC (TAIWAN)

Hsin-Wei Tang

National Taiwan University, ROC (TAIWAN)

Jung Kim

Kyungnam University, SOUTH KOREA

Koji Murata

Doshisha University, JAPAN

Krzysztof Tadeusz Koscielniak

Jagiellonian University, POLAND

Richard Rigby

Australian National University, AUSTRALIA

Roger Kanet

University of Miami, USA

Srikanth Kondapalli

Jawaharlal Nehru University, INDIA

Szu-Ning Ping

National Cheng Kung University, ROC (TAIWAN)

Tzu-Li Lin

Tunghai University, ROC (TAIWAN)

Wen-Yang Chang

National Chengchi University, ROC (TAIWAN)

EDITOR

Cheng-Hao Pao

Tamkang University, ROC (TAIWAN)

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Yen-Ting Wu

Tamkang University, ROC (TAIWAN)

MANAGING EDITOR

Wei-Hsiu Lin

Tamkang University, ROC (TAIWAN)

Tamkang Journal of International Affairs is an Open Access (OA) interdisciplinary journal issued in January, May, and September. It is devoted to providing an open forum for scholarly research and inquiry on a wide range of topics related to international relations, regional and global security, foreign policy, political and economic dynamics of states, and cross-strait relations with an emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region and other continents including Europe, Latin America, and Africa. It is published by the College of International Affairs of Tamkang University and is indexed in the Taiwan Open Access Journal Directory (TOAJ), Scopus, Airiti Library, and EBSCO.

CONTENTS

Research Article

- Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective 1**

Ying-Yu Lin

- A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication 55**

Ren-Shan Jia, Tung-Chieh Tsai

- Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a Globalized Context—A Comparative Study of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games 145**

Jen-Shin Yang

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

Ying-Yu Lin*

Abstract

In 2016, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) underwent a reform that significantly reorganized its structure. Under the principle that "the Central Military Commission exercises overall control, the theater commands are responsible for military operations, and the services focus on developing capabilities," the PLA made corresponding adjustments to the upper echelons and gradually extended the reform to the grassroots. However, in April 2024, the PLA disbanded the Strategic Support Force established during the 2016 reform, splitting it into three independent arms. Does it mean that the 2016 reform failed to achieve goals such as integrated joint operations? The PLA has played a crucial role in events like the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Russo-Ukrainian War starting from 2022, and a series of military exercises directed at Taiwan in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Did the PLA also find certain problem during its participation in these events? The answer could lie in the PLA's latest reorganization efforts in 2024. This study aims to examine the changes in the PLA from the angle of organizational

* Dr. Ying-Yu Lin is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Affairs and Strategic Studies at Tamkang University, Taiwan. Email: singfredrb@hotmail.com

factors that are crucial to a revolution in military affairs, with the goal of understanding both the outcomes and shortcomings of the PLA's reform efforts since 2016 while also deepening insights into its future combat capabilities.

Keywords: Military Reform, Revolution in military affairs, PLA research, COVID-19, Russo-Ukrainian War

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

3

● **Introduction**

In early 2022, the world closely watched as the war between Ukraine and Russia unfolded. By August of that year, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched military exercises around Taiwan, shifting global attention from Europe back to the Taiwan Strait. They were among the largest military drills conducted by the PLA since the Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis of 1996. Subsequently, in 2023 and 2024, the PLA once again carried out military exercises targeting Taiwan, attracting significant domestic and international attention. The focus of attention was on whether the PLA could demonstrate the effects of the 2016 reform and the resulting capabilities. Furthermore, following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022, people across various sectors have questioned whether the PLA is a "paper tiger," similar to the Russian forces on the battlefield in Ukraine. Given the many similarities between the PLA and the Russian military in terms of organizational structure and armament, the actual capabilities of the former have thus become a topic of discussion among external observers.

Moreover, although the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has impacted the global economy and the supply of energy and food, Taiwan's national security has not been significantly affected due to the considerable geographical distance between Taiwan and Ukraine. However, in August 2022, when then-U.S.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, China launched large-scale military exercises encircling the island, once again demonstrating that it has never abandoned use of force against the ROC government. Subsequently, in 2023 and 2024, China conducted further military exercises targeting Taiwan, specifically the “Joint Sword” drills, which have now become regularized. The exercises show that, following the 2016 reform, the PLA have acquired capabilities far surpassing those it possessed during the 1996 missile crisis. The transformation represents that the PLA has evolved from an ill-equipped force carrying “millet and rifles” into a modernized and digitized military capable of joint operations--no longer a “junkyard army” or “the world’s largest military museum,” as it was once sarcastically called.¹ This progress stems not only from lessons learned through the PLA’s engagements with foreign forces but also from its observations and studies of various post-Cold War conflicts. Furthermore, the PLA took advantage of the outflow of military research and development specialists following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, enhancing its own defense research capabilities and laying the foundation for its military-industrial sector.² At the end of

¹ Alexander Huang. “Examining Research on the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and the Tamkang School: A Review of 20 Years of Experience,” in *Contemporary Strategic Theory and Practice*, Ming-hsien Wong, eds. New Taipei City: Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies, Tamkang University, (2011): 247-249.

² Mikhail Barabanov, Vasily Kashin, and Konstantin Makienko. *Shooting Star: China’s Military Machine in the 21st Century: A Report by the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies*. Minnesota: East View Press, (2012);

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

5

2015, the PLA underwent its most extensive military reform since the era of Deng Xiaoping. This reform focused on restructuring the PLA, including reorganizing the four general departments of the Central Military Commission (CMC), reducing the seven military regions to five theater commands, and clearly defining the principle that "the Central Military Commission exercises overall control, the theater commands are responsible for military operations, and the services focus on developing capabilities." The establishment of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) and the Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF) also contributed to the formation of a new command and control structure.³

A comprehensive examination of China's defense modernization reveals that its strategic guidance has evolved through lessons learned and stimuli from real-world war cases, while its weaponry and equipment have advanced alongside technological progress and foreign acquisitions--constructing military modernization through the integration of hardware and software. However, military strength is not solely dependent on advanced weaponry; organizational structure plays a more critical role in combat effectiveness. It was a top priority of the 2016

Ming Cheung Tai. *China's Emergence as a Defense Technological Power*. New York: Routledge, (2012).

³ Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders. *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*. Washington D.C: National Defense University Press, (2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-10.pdf>

reform, which was further extended to grassroots units in 2017. The extension was described as the reform reaching areas "from the neck down," involving the consolidation of grassroots units and military academies.⁴ Nevertheless, in 2024, the PLA implemented another organizational change, specifically the deactivation of the corps-level SSF established in 2016 and the reorganization of the force into three independent arms.⁵ Does it signify the failure of the reform, or does it highlight shortcomings that would emerge under new stimuli? These questions deserve more consideration.

From 2016 to 2024, the PLA's weapons and equipment have advanced significantly, driven by China's scientific and technological progress. Whether in stealth fighter jets, aircraft carriers, various warships equipped with advanced combat systems, or hypersonic missiles, the PLA has demonstrated considerable advancements in military technology. However, in terms of organizational changes, the 2016 reform resembled a major surgical operation on the PLA. After the surgery, could the "patient" regain its health or become even stronger--more combat-capable in military terms? Or did new organizational

⁴ Chun Li. "The 'Below-the-Neck' Reform Begins: How Military Reform Adapts to Changing Circumstances?" China Military Online, February 27, (2017). http://www.81.cn/2017qglh/2017-02/27/content_7503829.htm.

⁵ Xiao Ming Li. "Press Conference on the Establishment of the Information Support Force," People's Daily Online, April 20, (2024). <http://military.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2024/0420/c1011-40219744.html>.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

7

issues emerge during the recovery process, prompting China to implement another structural adjustment in April 2024? How will these developments affect the future combat strength of the PLA? This paper aims to examine these questions.

● The PLA's restructuring in 2016

Generally speaking, the process of a country's defense modernization can be divided into four stages: theoretical exploration, technological development, organizational establishment, and talent cultivation.⁶ Since the Gulf War of 1991, the PLA has come to understand new types of warfare in the new era and has begun extensively translating relevant foreign research materials. In particular, after the Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis of 1996, the PLA further solidified its understanding of how to conduct local wars under high-tech conditions. Following the War in Afghanistan (2001 to 2021) and the Iraq War (2003), the PLA recognized that information technology is key to battlefield victory. It introduced a defense policy focused on developing military strategies to win local wars under informationized conditions.⁷ However, due to insufficient

⁶ Peter Mattis. *Analyzing the Chinese Military: A Review Essay and Resource Guide on the People's Liberation Army*. South Carolina: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, (2015).35

⁷ Rui Xue Bai, Zheng Yan Xiong, and Zhi Hui Li. "China's Active Defense Military Strategy Has Undergone Multiple Adjustments," *People's Daily Online*, May 26, (2015).

<http://military.people.com.cn/n/2015/0526/c172467-27057937.html>.

technological capabilities, the PLA was unable to implement the concept of informationized warfare. During Hu Jintao's tenure, China leveraged its rapid economic growth to establish a foundation for technological advancement. Later, under the 2016 military reform initiated by Xi Jinping, efforts were concentrated on restructuring the PLA's command and control structure to meet the demands of modern warfare. Additionally, reforms in military academy were introduced with the goal of achieving the modernization of national defense and the armed forces by 2035.⁸

The PLA gradually recognized its inferiority to the U.S. military after the 1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis and the 2003 Iraq War. It identified its primary goal as enhancing the informatization of its equipment to transition its forces from mechanization toward informatization. In any revolution in military affairs, the first challenge to overcome is technological development. With the rapid growth of China's economy, the PLA could have a sufficient budget to upgrade its equipment and significantly boost its overall strength. However, equipment is not the sole indicator of military strength. Without an effectively integrated command mechanism, the armed forces of a nation will still be vulnerable even if they possess the best equipment in the world. Especially in the era of informationized warfare, command,

⁸ Shu Yin He. "PLA Daily Commentator: Comprehensively Advancing the Modernization of National Defense and the Armed Forces," Ministry of National Defense of China, March 21, (2023).<http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/jmsd/16210796.html>.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

9

control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems can facilitate the rapid transmission of information with the support of information technology. However, if power is exercised through overly layered bureaucratic structures or management frameworks that fail to meet the demands of joint operations, the strength of a military will be constrained. PLA-related research has also observed that while the PLA has undoubtedly built its joint operations on technological advancements that enable swift battlefield information flow, it may not be able to fully exploit the advantages of informatization if its organizational structure remains a traditional hierarchy requiring multiple levels of approval before decisions can be made.⁹ Before the 2016 reform, the commanders of the seven military regions were primarily from the army, raising doubts about their ability to effectively command naval and air forces within their jurisdiction. These were among the challenges the PLA faced before the 2016 reform.

Since Xi assumed the chairmanship of the CMC at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012, he has introduced significant changes to the PLA. The previously emphasized principles of “political competence, military excellence, exemplary conduct, strict discipline, and robust support” were revised to “Follow the Party's command,

⁹ Xiao Han and Kejia Sun. *Research on Issues in the Critical Period of Contemporary Chinese Military Reform*. Beijing: National Defense University Press, March, (2017): 46–57.

win battles, and maintain exemplary conduct.¹⁰” The “Party” here refers to the CPC. This reiterates the absolute obedience of the PLA to the CPC’s command, a point Xi has consistently emphasized in every speech he delivered on military affairs at the 18th to the 20th National Congresses.¹¹ This further reinforces that while “the Party commands the gun” has always been a fundamental tenet of the CPC, the principle that “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” remains an unchanging iron rule.

● The process of the military reform

The military reform pushed forward by Xi can be traced back to March 2014, when the “Central Military Commission Leading Group for Deepening National Defense and Military Reform” was established. The establishment of the leading group sparked media speculations about the anticipated military reform,¹² but widespread skepticism remained regarding whether a traditional robust military like the PLA could undergo a

¹⁰ Wei Zheng Shao and Bu Qian Li. *Following the Party's Command*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2014): 235–240.

¹¹ Yi Biao Wang. “Deeply Understanding the Major Arrangements of the 20th Party Congress on Upholding the Party's Comprehensive Leadership and Strict Governance,” *People's Daily Online*, January 3, (2023).
<http://theory.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2023/0103/c40531-32598865.html>.

¹² Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders. *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*,
<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-10.pdf?ver=2017-03-21-152018-430>.

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

11

complete transformation in a short period. Subsequently, in September 2015, Xi announced a reduction of 300,000 troops during a military parade. In November 2015, the military reform officially commenced. The reform focused on reorganizing the four general departments of the CMC into 15 functional units, transforming the seven military regions into five theater commands, establishing the Army Headquarters, activating the SSF and the JLSF, renaming the Second Artillery Corps as the Rocket Force, and formally instituting the command principle: “The Central Military Commission exercises overall control, the theater commands are responsible for military operations, and the services focus on developing capabilities.”¹³

As is widely recognized, the four key elements--fighting, equipment, organization, and training--form the fundamental principles of force construction. When China designated the 2003 Iraq War as the guiding reference for its military development, it became clear that integrated joint operations would play a leading role in future warfare.¹⁴ This is what the "fighting" mentioned above refers to. During China's rapid economic growth in recent decades, the PLA has acquired high-tech technologies from

¹³Ying Yu Lin. “The Implications of China's Military Reforms,” *The Diplomat*, March 7, (2016).

<http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/the-implications-of-chinas-military-reforms/>

¹⁴ Ya Ming Li and Tai Wu Chen. *The Deep Structure of the Communist China's Military Reform: Changes and Constants in Communist Chinese Military Thought*. Taipei: College of Political Warfare, National Defense University, (2012): 99–107.

abroad through both legal purchases and illicit means, applying them to newly developed equipment and enhancing its capability to engage in modern warfare. However, without corresponding structural reforms, high-tech equipment cannot be effectively utilized, let alone facilitate joint operations. Unlike previous forms of combined or coordinated operations between branches or arms, integrated joint operations emphasize a cross-service command structure that merges different military services and operational domains into a unified, interconnected combat model, with organizational integration serving as the key factor.¹⁵

Before the 2016 military reform, some Chinese military researchers had already identified issues related to organizational adjustments and recognized that an effective command system would be crucial in maximizing the efficiency of system-based operations and joint warfare.¹⁶ However, in the relatively closed environment of the military, implementing reforms has always been a difficult task--especially in the PLA, which places strong emphasis on following the CPC's command. This further illustrates the significant impact of the 2016 reform on the PLA.

¹⁵ Military Strategy Research Department, Academy of Military Sciences. Strategic Studies. Beijing: Academy of Military Sciences Press, (2013): 124–127.

¹⁶ Zhen Fan Min and Bao Cun Wang. The Organizational System for Constructing an Informatized Military. Li Zhang eds. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2005): 304–309; Wei Feng Han, Yong Sheng Kang, and Ling Juan Kong. Combat-Oriented Military Reform. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2015): 90–103.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

13

● The reorganization of the CMC

This military reform reorganized the outdated command system of the PLA into a new structure suited for integrated joint operations.¹⁷ Prior to the reform, although the PLA had a mechanism for transitioning from military regions to theater commands, the peacetime management system represented by the seven major military regions was not conducive to integrated joint operations. The army-centric logistics system and the administrative nature of the seven major military regions, which primarily focused on land defense, were insufficient to meet modern warfare challenges.¹⁸ Before the reform, the PLA's command system was primarily managed through the seven major military regions, which were divided based on strategic needs and encompassed first-level units across the services. These regions were under the direct leadership of the General Staff Department of the CMC, overseeing military affairs within their jurisdiction, including militia mobilization and troop conscription.¹⁹ However, since the seven major military regions were demarcated based on geographic divisions, they were

¹⁷ Tian You Ren. "An Exploration of Certain Mechanisms for Deepening National Defense and Military Reform," in *Strong Military Forum*, Chinese Military Culture Society, eds. Beijing: People's Publishing House, (2017): 47–52.

¹⁸ Yan Xu. "The Farewell of the Major Military Region System from China's Military Stage," in *Strong Military Strategy*, Yazhou Liu, Zhi Cao, and Tiezhu Zhang, eds. Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong Chubanshe, (2016): 350–353.

¹⁹ Tao Guan and Li Yao. *The Military Geography of China's Theater Commands*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2005): 4–5.

naturally subject to army control. Consequently, the PLA's ground forces did not have a dedicated Army Headquarters before the reform and were instead directly managed by the General Staff Department.

At that time, maritime and aerial conflicts in China's surrounding regions continued to intensify. The roles of naval and air forces thus became increasingly important. However, questions arose as to whether military region commanders, who predominantly came from the army, had the authority to command naval and air forces within their jurisdiction. In particular, the PLA has been primarily led by the CMC from past to present. Before the 2016 reform, CMC members still included the commanders of the navy and air force. That was where uncertainties arose. While military region commanders held the rank of general, naval and air forces within their jurisdiction faced a dilemma due to the PLA's rank-based hierarchy: whether to follow the orders of their military region commanders or to take command from their respective service chiefs, who were also members of the CMC. Under the previous system, these issues posed challenges to the PLA's command and control structure.²⁰

²⁰ Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, Jr.. "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation," China Brief, February, (2016).
https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CB_16_3_2.pdf?x11163.

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

15

“The reorganization of the PLA,” according to the principle of “the CMC chairman overall responsibility system. To establish a command-and-control mechanism suited for modern joint operations, the PLA had to undergo structural reforms—one of the main reasons for Xi to push for the military reform.²¹ The most crucial aspect of the 2016 military reform was the establishment of the principle: “The Central Military Commission exercises overall control, the theater commands are responsible for military operations, and the services focus on developing capabilities.” This reform formally restructured the CMC, retaining the Chairman, two Vice Chairmen, the Joint Staff Department (formerly the General Staff Department), the Political Work Department (formerly the General Political Department), the Ministry of National Defense, and the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission. The General Armaments Department and the General Logistics Department of the CMC were dissolved, and service commanders were removed from the organization. Furthermore, the reform explicitly granted the commanders of the five theater commands--Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, and Central--the authority to oversee ground, naval, air, rocket, and People’s Armed Police forces within their jurisdiction. This solidified the principle that theater commands are responsible for coordinating combat operations while clarifying the command

²¹ Ke Hai Wang, Bing Wang, and Zheng Rong Cao. *Research on Integrated Joint Operations*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2005): 27.

structure for integrated joint operations.²² The post-reform PLA consisted of five services: the Army, the Navy, the Air force, the Second Artillery Corps-turned Rocket Force, and the newly-created SSF.²³

● The significance of an independent service or arm

Furthermore, regarding the PLA's command, control, communications, and intelligence system, a Chinese military researcher pointed out that separate information networks within different services hinder the advancement of integrated joint operations. Even with the integration of various systems across the services, each service still independently manages its own systems, resulting in unnecessary redundancies and unclear divisions of authority. The researcher argued that there is a need to establish a new, independent, information-based military

²² Feng Dai, Yu Gen Wang, and Guang Yi Luo. "Shouldering the Historic Responsibility of Pioneering and Establishing the Theater—Interview with Eastern Theater Commander Liu Yuejun," China Military Online, March 4, (2016).
http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/zhuantu/content/2016-03/04/content_6940918.htm ;
Qing Gang Yang, Zhao Ping Qin, and Guo Tao Zhao. "Commander of the Central Theater Command Han Weiguo: A Detailed Explanation of Seven Differences Between Theater Commands and Major Military Regions," China Military Online, March 7, (2016).
http://www.81.cn/zbzq/2016-03/07/content_6945985.htm.

²³ Yen Ching Weng. *The History and Military Strength of the Chinese Communist Party and Its Threat to Taiwan*. Taipei: Hsin Rui Creative Publishing House, (2023): 196.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

17

service to consolidate information management and achieve dominance in the electromagnetic spectrum.²⁴

During the 2016 reform, the PLA put similar units previously scattered among different departments and services under the SSF. The restructuring included ground-based aerospace systems and astronaut management units,²⁵ cyber warfare units, and certain public opinion warfare units. Command, control, communications, and intelligence systems for electronic communications were managed by a newly-established, independent corps-level department under the theater-level SSF.²⁶ The SSF was at the same grade as the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force. It did not take command from theater commands but was instead directly subordinate to the CMC as an independent service.²⁷ This organizational design resolved the earlier problem of separate services independently managing their own tactical data

²⁴ Guo Xing Xu. *Research on the Construction of Chinese Military's Information Warfare Combat Power*. Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, (2013): 64.

²⁵ Wu Dang and Ke Jin Zhang. "How Does the Military Determine Preliminary Candidates for the 19th National Congress Representatives?" China Military Online, May 25, (2017).
http://zb.81.cn/content/2017-05/25/content_7617929_2.htm.

²⁶ Ying Yu Lin. "The Missions and Scale of the PLA's Strategic Support Force," *Prospect & Exploration*, 15, no. 10 (2017): 117–119.

²⁷ John Chen, Joe McReynolds, and Kieran Green. "The PLA Strategic Support Force: A 'Joint' Force for Information Operations," in *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context*, Joel Wuthnow, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, and Andrew N.D. Yang eds. Washington D.C: National Defense University Press, (2021).153-155

systems. Using a single military service as the framework for a unified network system could save implementation time but risked making that service overly dominant. The PLA, eager to break free from traditional constraints, sought to avoid such an outcome. Therefore, the establishment of the independent SSF resolved the problem of each service operating in its own way. It also contributed to the integration of cyber warfare units previously scattered across the General Staff Department, General Political Department, and service branches into the SSF's network systems department, preventing redundancies and unclear divisions of authority. Regarding aerospace affairs, the SSF was responsible only for backend satellite remote sensing, while satellite launch center management and rocket technology development remained under the Equipment Development Department of the CMC, the former General Armaments Department.

The military reform enforced by Xi, in addition to promoting integrated joint operations, also focused on enhancing the logistics system. In September 2016, the PLA established the JLSF as the primary force providing joint logistics support and strategic campaign support. Previously, the General Logistics Department managed logistics across all services, directly coordinating with the seven military regions under an army-centric framework, while the navy and air force operated within their own systems. Such a division could not meet the

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

19

demands of modern joint operations. Although there was a mechanism enabling the seven military regions led by the General Staff Department to transition from an administrative management system to a CMC-led joint operations system during wartime, doubts remained about whether the logistics system could adapt just as swiftly during the shift from peacetime to wartime operations. The PLA recognized this problem, but transferring power and responsibilities from military regions to theater commands would create tensions between central and local authorities. Although attempts were made to reform the PLA's organization, such as the experimental introduction of a unified logistics system in the Jinan Military Region in 2007, it was merely a single-region "pilot" program, far from a fully implemented project across the entire military. The experiment in the Jinan Military Region demonstrated that only by reforming the overall PLA structure could joint logistics be effectively improved.²⁸ However, this task could not be completed quickly due to the number of units to be involved and the potential need for a comprehensive restructuring of the PLA.

Following the reform, the General Logistics Department was restructured into the Logistics Support Department and downgraded in status, as evidenced by its chief's removal from CMC membership and reassignment as a theater

²⁸ Chuan Xin Yu, ed. *Joint Logistics Course*. Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, (2011): 52–54.

commander-grade leader. The department head's exclusion from the list of CMC members was followed by the establishment of the JLSF, with its commander at the grade of theater deputy commander, in September 2016 as an independent service alongside the Army, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, and SSF. This fundamentally reshaped the PLA's logistics system. The JLSF, directly subordinate to the CMC, features the Joint Logistics Support Base in Wuhan, Hubei Province. The Wuhan base oversees five Joint Logistics Support Centers located in Jiangsu Province's Wuxi, Guangxi Province's Guilin, Qinghai Province's Xining, Liaoning Province's Shenyang, and Henan Province's Zhengzhou. These centers provide logistics support to the theater commands in which they are located. The service's primary mission is to break down barriers between different services, unify resource allocation, and shift its focus from primarily supporting the Army to providing medical and logistical support to all military components in any theater. The post-reform Logistics Support Department is responsible for logistics planning and budgeting, while the JLSF serves as the executing entity. Under the principle that "the theater commands are responsible for military operations and the services focus on developing capabilities," the PLA's logistics system has undergone a considerable restructuring.²⁹

²⁹ Tian Liang Xiao, ed. *Strategic Studies*. Beijing: National Defense University Press, (2020): 413–414.

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

21

Following the reform, the PLA's restructured organization not only enhances the effectiveness of joint operations and logistics but also places both the SSF--throughout its activation and deactivation--and the JLSF directly under the CMC. This grants the CMC direct control over theater-level field forces. In modern warfare, intelligence and logistics are indispensable. The SSF, which was responsible for C4ISR and aerospace operations, was not under the control of any theater command—nor has been the JLSF, responsible for theater logistics, been under such control.³⁰ This means that by retaining direct authority over intelligence, information, and logistical resources, the CMC maintains control over theater forces, preventing unchecked decision-making by theater commanders.

Nevertheless, challenges persist within the newly established military services and arms. For instance, the SSF, tasked with aerospace affairs, cyber operations, and C4ISR, might have been overloaded with an excessively broad range of responsibilities. This raised concerns about whether its leadership could effectively manage these specialized domains. Moreover, the Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in 2022, has once again demonstrated that the nature of war continues to evolve. This raised questions about whether the command-and-control system established in the 2016 reform remains suitable for contemporary

³⁰ Wen Chung Chai. "The Organization and Missions of the PLA Strategic Support Force," *Defense Strategy and Assessment*, 13, no. 1 (2013): 81.

military conflicts. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic in China in 2020, the PLA played a critical role in supporting efforts to combat the pandemic. The mobilization of military resources during this period also served as a test for the JLSF.³¹ These events provided valuable opportunities to assess the strength of the post-reform PLA.

● **The impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine on the PLA's restructuring**

Despite the sweeping military reform implemented by Xi in 2016, the PLA's peacetime operations appear to function normally without any major issues. The new organizational structure has even been tested in various training exercises. However, without the trial of actual combat, it is impossible to truly assess the reform's effect on the PLA's performance. Nevertheless, in peacetime, military exercises and disaster relief operations serve as the best indicators of a military's capabilities--especially when responding to unpredictable crises like natural disasters or pandemics. Flexible troop command and the overall operational structure of the armed forces become critical in such situations. Moreover, the Russo-Ukrainian War has introduced significant changes to modern warfare, including new tactical and

³¹ Wen Tao Zhang, "New Achievements in Military Reform: The Important Role of the Joint Logistics Support Force in Fighting the Pandemic," Special issue on China's national defense force behind the fight against the pandemic, *Ordnance Industry Science Technology*, no. 5 (2022): 89.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

23

technological applications. Whether these developments will substantially impact the restructured PLA remains a key concern for outside observers.³²

● The post-reform PLA put to the test during the pandemic³³

In January 2020, COVID-19 broke out in China and soon spread globally. Given the limitations of China's emergency response system, the PLA was called upon to assist in what became a disaster-like situation. Unlike military exercises, emergency response and disaster relief missions are fraught with unpredictability. The transportation of supplies and deployment of relief forces test a military's logistics support, military-civilian coordination, medical services, and even reserve mobilization mechanism--all of which reflect the overall readiness of the armed forces.³⁴

³² "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022." Royal United Services Institute, Accessed November.30, 2022.

<https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-conventional-warfighting-russias-invasion-ukraine-february-july-2022>.

³³ Ying Yu Lin. "The Role and System of the PLA Medical and Health Service System in Facing the Pandemic: A Comparison Before and After Military Reform," *Mainland China Studies*, 65, no. 3, (2022): 81–96.

³⁴ Ji Wei Guo. *War for Biological Dominance*. Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, (2010): 143, 191.

In the PLA's efforts to support the fight against the pandemic, the military medical system played a highly effective role. After the 2016 reform, the medical system was decentralized across different services and theaters. Although the newly established JLSF could mobilize medical resources through the joint logistics support centers in the five theaters and military hospitals under the Wuhan Joint Logistics Support Base, military hospitals under the services were not effectively mobilized. The main reason was that at that time, both the JLSF and the services reported directly to the CMC--a condition that remains unchanged. However, while the commanders of the services are at the grade of theater commander, the JLSF commander is only a theater deputy commander-grade leader.³⁵ The performance of the PLA during the fight against the pandemic revealed several areas for improvement in the post-reform logistics system. Issues such as the division of responsibilities between the JLSF and theater-level service forces, the allocation of support forces, and the delegation of approval authority were not resolved during the reform's restructuring. It indicates that the administrative capabilities of the PLA failed to keep up with the military reform. Although the

³⁵ Shu Fan Ding. "The PLA and COVID-19: Challenges of Logistics Mobilization After Military Reform," *Prospect & Exploration*, 18, no. 3 (2020): 2–8.

required personnel were in place, they still needed time to achieve effective coordination.³⁶

● **Stimuli from the Russo-Ukrainian War**

The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which erupted in February 2022, drew global attention for an extended period. Russia was unable to end the war quickly, and its insufficient logistical support caused the fighting to be prolonged till now. Meanwhile, Ukraine lacked sufficient combat personnel, preventing it from making decisive breakthroughs on the front lines. A stalemate was thus formed and continues to the moment.³⁷ For the PLA, the conflict holds particular significance due to notable similarities between the Russian military's equipment, organizational structures, and tactical doctrines and those of the PLA.³⁸ China also closely examines the effects of integrating public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and

³⁶ Jun Li, Ming Yue Ma, Hong Guang Zhou, Yang Zhao, Xiao Lin Han, and Shu Sen Guo.

“Development Opportunities and Challenges for Division-Level Hospitals of the Joint Logistics

Support Force,” *Hospital Administration Journal of Chinese People's Liberation Army*, 27, no. 11, (2020): 1035–1038.

³⁷ Ching Yen Huang and Chih Hung Dai. *Contemporary Russian Military Power and the War in Ukraine*. Taipei: Hanlu Book and Publishing Company, (2023): 655–662.

³⁸ Chih Te Yuan. *Soviet Influence in Chinese Military Thought: The Soviet Strategic Roots in CCP Military Doctrine*. Taichung: Yueh Hsiang Digital Printing Co., (2012).135

cognitive warfare into military operations.³⁹ As a result, the Russo-Ukrainian War has become a key case study for the PLA, offering valuable lessons and insights to refine future military operations.⁴⁰

The battles of the Russo-Ukrainian War have once again demonstrated the critical importance of C4ISR. While unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, have achieved significant combat results, the achievement does not solely depend on the UAVs themselves. Instead, the key factor is the backend control system and the seamless flow of the information network.⁴¹ This is what truly enables drones to function efficiently. In aerospace technology, both the Global Positioning System (GPS) of the U.S. and Russia's GLONASS satellite navigation system have proven to be indispensable auxiliary tools in modern warfare. These

³⁹ Chung Han Wu. "An Analysis of the Cognitive Warfare Capabilities of the PLA Strategic Support Force," *Prospect Quarterly*, 24, no. 4, (2023): 15.

⁴⁰ Editorial Department of Shipborne Weapons. "Encirclement Warfare in the Field: Insights on the Taiwan Issue from the Russo-Ukrainian War," *Shipborne Weapons*, no. 6 (2022): 8–14; Ying Yu Lin. "What the PLA Is Learning From Russia's Ukraine Invasion," *The Diplomat*, April 20, (2022). <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/what-the-pla-is-learning-from-russias-ukraine-invasion/>.

⁴¹ "The Orlan Complex: Tracking the Supply Chains of Russia's Most Successful UAV." Royal United Services Institute, Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/orlan-complex-tracking-supply-chains-russias-most-successful-uav>.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

27

developments introduce new dynamics in modern warfare, as observed in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.⁴²

Furthermore, these responsibilities were not fully consolidated under the SSF during the reform. Instead, many tasks continued to be handled by different services and organizations directly under the CMC. For example, in aerospace operations, while the aerospace systems department of the SSF managed remote sensing systems, satellite launch centers remained under the Equipment Development Department of the CMC. Moreover, rocket launch vehicles were still tied to the Rocket Force's equipment development, and ground-based auxiliary radar operations still required Air Force support.⁴³ Such a redundant layering of responsibilities was detrimental to the maximization of combat capabilities in the increasingly important field of aerospace operations. In contrast, the U.S. military established the Space Force to integrate all space-related operations under a single command. The organization of the post-reform PLA still left significant room for improvement. Similar problems also arose at the information communication

⁴² Col. Markus Reisner. "Krieg in der Ukraine: Die Erfolgsgeschichte der ukrainischen Artillerie," interview by Österreichs Bundesheer, May 20, (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzAl29Gl9MA>.

⁴³ Lt. Gen. R. S. Panwar. "China's Strategic Support Force and Its Implications for India, Part I: Concept, Organisation and Space Operations," *Future Wars*, June 9, (2020). <https://futurewars.rspanwar.net/chinas-special-support-force-and-its-implications-for-india-part-i/>

base of the SSF. Although the SSF took charge of the C4ISR system for the entire military, its corps-level arms faced difficulties when interacting with higher echelons, such as the theater-level services and theater units. As a result, although the SSF was established out of necessity during the reform, its subordinate units were not granted sufficient authority, making it difficult for them to take a leading role in interactions with relevant units.

Such issues could also be understood by examining the backgrounds of the commanders of the SSF from its activation to deactivation. The first SSF commander, Gao Jin, came from the Second Artillery Corps, now the Rocket Force. Compared with the Army, Navy, and Air Force, the Second Artillery Corps possessed a higher degree of technological specialization, making it more compatible with a tech-driven service like the SSF.⁴⁴ However, the second SSF commander, Li Fengbiao, spent his military career primarily in airborne forces and lacked a high-tech background.⁴⁵ The third commander, Ju Qiansheng, came from the technical reconnaissance department of the General Staff

⁴⁴ “Commander of the Strategic Support Force Gao Jin.” Wen Wei Po, Accessed January 2, 2016.
<http://paper.wenweipo.com/2016/01/02/CH1601020011.htm>.

⁴⁵ “Former Commander of the Strategic Support Force Transferred to Political Commissar of the Western Theater Command.” Oriental Daily News, Accessed January 26, 2022.
https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/cnnews/20220129/bkn-20220129100225864-0129_00952_001.html.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

29

Department and had experience in information-related fields.⁴⁶ Although most of the SSF's successive deputy commanders had expertise in aerospace operations--such as Li Shangfu, Shang Hong, and Hao Weizhong, all of whom had aerospace technology-related backgrounds--or specialized in cyber warfare, like Zheng Junjie, the complexity of the service's tasks made it difficult to find a leader with expertise in every field who could effectively manage all aspects. These issues became evident in the operations of the SSF after its formation. The Russo-Ukrainian War has further underscored the growing importance of cyber warfare, aerospace systems, and C4ISR. The organizational structure of the SSF, established in 2016, might no longer be sufficient to meet the demands of modern warfare.⁴⁷

On April 19, 2024, the PLA officially disbanded the SSF. In the newly announced organizational structure of the PLA, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Rocket Force still maintain their theater-level status, while the SSF's three former corps-level arms--the aerospace systems department, responsible for space operations; the cyber systems department, tasked with cyber warfare; and the information communication base, which

⁴⁶ Kai Hsiang You. "PLA Generals Who Understand Hacker Mindset Step Out; Scholar Warns Taiwan to Be Cautious in Information Warfare," Central News Agency, July 7, (2021). <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip/202107070053.aspx>.

⁴⁷ Central News Agency. "PLA Establishes Information Support Force; Experts Say It Helps Improve Joint Operations System," Central News Agency, April 28, (2024). <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202404280143.aspx>.

managed C4ISR—have been reorganized into the Aerospace Force, the Cyber Force, and the Information Support Force respectively.⁴⁸ If the three newly established forces share the same grade as the JLSF, it means that the former theater-level SSF has been reorganized into three theater deputy commander-grade arms, with their commanders holding the rank of lieutenant general/vice admiral or general/admiral. The newly-formed Aerospace Force might have been modeled after the U.S. Space Force, while the Cyber Force resembles the U.S. Cyber Command. This restructuring indicates that the 2016 reform might not have been sufficient to fully deal with the challenges of modern warfare. The Russo-Ukrainian War has made the PLA keenly aware of the need for further structural adjustments to ensure that the Aerospace Force, Cyber Force, and Information Support Force receive direct command from the CMC as theater deputy commander-grade forces.⁴⁹ The theater deputy commander-grade status allows them to interact more effectively with theater commands and the services. They also cooperate with the JLSF, demonstrating the CMC's effective control over military intelligence and logistics. Regardless of how the PLA's

⁴⁸ Jia Rong Lu. "China Disbands Strategic Support Force and Establishes Information Support Force," Central News Agency, April 19, (2024). <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202404190314.aspx>.

⁴⁹ Ying Yu Lin and Tzu Hao Liao. "RIP, SSF: Unpacking the PLA's Latest Restructuring," The Diplomat, April 24, (2024). <https://thediplomat.com/diplomat-brief/2024/vol17/index.html>.

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

31

organizational structure changes, maintaining centralized control by the CMC remains an unchanging principle.

● The deep-rooted corruption in the military

Shortly after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War, the Russian military launched a three-front offensive against Ukraine, even posing a significant threat to Kyiv at one point. However, as the conflict dragged on and Ukrainian forces mounted counteroffensives, Russia's advances were significantly hindered.⁵⁰ Following the Chechen Wars in the 1990s, Russia implemented a series of military reforms to reorganize its defense structure. Unlike the Soviet era, which prioritized the development of nuclear weapons and ground forces, the post-Cold War Russian military first had to deal with issues such as fragmented troop command, theft and illicit sales of military supplies, inflated budget reports, and corruption--problems that continue to plague the Russian military today.⁵¹

The CPC's fight against corruption has never stopped. Since 2012, quite a few high-ranking generals at the CMC level, including Xu Caihou, Guo Boxiong, Fang Fenghui, and Zhang Yang, have been implicated in corruption scandals. By 2023, even

⁵⁰ Royal United Services Institute, "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022,"

⁵¹ Shu Yin Li, Ji Chang Wang, and Xi Zhang. *An Analysis of Russian Military Intelligence*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2018): 124–125.

former Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and his successor Li Shangfu were disciplined for corruption, and several Rocket Force leaders were dismissed for similar irregularities.⁵² These incidents indicate that despite the chilling effect caused by the downfall of the “Xu-Guo clique,” corruption remains deeply entrenched within the PLA. The problem has not been eradicated by any military reforms or Xi’s hard-line approach; instead, it continues to surface repeatedly within the PLA.

During the military exercises that China conducted around Taiwan in 2022, various types of Dongfeng-series missiles were launched to achieve intimidation effects, with several even flying over Taiwan proper before landing in the Pacific Ocean. Notably, Chinese state media reported that a total of 16 missiles were fired, while Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense stated that only 11 had been detected. Was it possible that five missiles failed to launch? This doubt sparked discussions about the Rocket Force’s equipment readiness rate. Although there has been no direct evidence to confirm the speculation, the recent drastic personnel reshuffles within the Rocket Force--especially among its leadership--suggest that internal corruption has become a serious issue.⁵³ The appointment of two officers from other

⁵² Ying Yu Lin. “Examining PLA Combat Power Through Rocket Force Leadership Changes,” *Prospect & Exploration*, 21, no. 9, (2023): 30–36.

⁵³ Ying Yu Lin. “PLA Personnel Shakeups And Their Implications,” *China Brief*, February 2, (2024).
<https://jamestown.org/program/pla-personnel-shakeups-and-their-implications/>

Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational Adjustment Perspective

33

services--neither with prior experience in the Rocket Force or its predecessor, the Second Artillery Corps--as the new commander and political commissar of the Rocket Force underscores the need to rely on personnel from outside the force to restore its effectiveness. Real-world cases from the Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrate that corruption severely weakens combat strength. It is one of the greatest factors that will affect the PLA's combat capabilities.

● Conclusion

The 2016 reform laid the foundation for the PLA's organizational restructuring efforts. The resulting structural adjustments were expected to enable the PLA to engage in modern warfare. The goal of these reform efforts was to develop integrated joint operations capabilities.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, China introduced another significant change to the structure of the PLA in April 2024. The main reason behind this might have been issues with the coordination of organizations established during the reform, which did not become apparent until the PLA's involvement in the fight against the pandemic in 2020. The outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022 also gave the PLA an opportunity to observe and better understand the nature of modern warfare. These factors may have influenced the PLA's decision to restructure once more. It represents that the structure

⁵⁴ Tian Liang Xiao, ed. *Strategic Studies*, 339.

of a military will evolve not only because of technological innovations but also in response to changes in warfare and advancements in equipment. This idea underpins the concept of “fighting, equipment, organization, and training,” which is frequently referred to in military affairs. The first step is to determine the type of war to engage in, followed by acquiring new equipment and technological applications. Next, command and control structures should be established based on the nature of the conflict. Finally, the effectiveness of these new structures must be verified through training exercises. The PLA is no exception. A major concern for the PLA is whether the new structures will function effectively. Another pressing issue is the potential emergence of new issues in future military operations. The answers have yet to be found out.

In addition to the four elements that shape a military—fighting, equipment, organization, and training—personnel quality is also a crucial factor in determining combat effectiveness. While assessing the actual capabilities of service members remains a difficult task, the PLA’s ongoing anti-corruption campaign suggests that internal corruption is still an unresolved issue. As previously mentioned, following the downfall of former CMC leaders Xu and Guo, four other military leaders—Fang, Zhang, Wei, and Li—were disciplined for corruption in succession. Wei was promoted to the rank of general by Xi, while Li was a princeling, belonging to the

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

35

second-generation of the CPC's founding members.⁵⁵ Even the Rocket Force leadership was deeply embroiled in corruption, leading to the replacement of its commander and political commissar with appointees from the Navy and Air Force, rather than officers promoted from within the force itself.⁵⁶ Such personnel appointments are similar to the PLA's approach during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, when laymen led experts and political loyalty was prioritized over professional expertise. Could this practice be counter-productive to the increasingly professionalized PLA? Although the PLA has made significant progress in developing doctrine, technology, and organizational structure, its prioritization of loyalty over expertise raises the question of whether it can withstand the test of actual combat. After all, war is fought by individual soldiers, making individual competence the most crucial factor. Within the framework of party-military relations in the PLA, will new networks of corruption emerge? Such developments would have direct implications for the PLA's overall combat effectiveness.

⁵⁵ Central News Agency. "Two Successive Chinese Defense Ministers Removed for Massive Corruption: Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu Expelled from the Party," Central News Agency, June 27, (2024).
<https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202406270380.aspx>.

⁵⁶ Shi Feng Liao. "Rocket Force Commander Unusually Appointed from the Navy: Wang Houbin Takes the Role," United Daily News, August 1, (2023).
<https://udn.com/news/story/7331/7337967>.

● Bibliography

Allen, Kenneth, Blasko, Dennis J., and Corbett, Jr. John F.. “The PLA’s New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation.” *China Brief*. February, (2016). https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CB_16_3_2.pdf?x111163.

Bai, Rui Xue, Xiong, Zheng Yan, Li, and Zhi Hui. “China's Active Defense Military Strategy Has Undergone Multiple Adjustments.” *People's Daily Online*. May 26, (2015). <http://military.people.com.cn/n/2015/0526/c172467-27057937.html>.

Barabanov, Mikhail, Kashin, Vasily, and Makienko, Konstantin. *Shooting Star: China's Military Machine in the 21st Century: A Report by the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies*. Minnesota: East View Press, (2012).

Central News Agency. “PLA Establishes Information Support Force; Experts Say It Helps Improve Joint Operations System.” *Central News Agency*. April 28, (2024). <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202404280143.aspx>.

Central News Agency. “Two Successive Chinese Defense Ministers Removed for Massive Corruption: Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu Expelled from the Party.” *Central News Agency*.

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

37

June 27, (2024).
<https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202406270380.aspx>.

Chai, Wen Chung. "The Organization and Missions of the PLA Strategic Support Force," *Defense Strategy and Assessment*, 13, no. 1 (2013). 64-92

Chen, John, McReynolds, Joe, and Green, Kieran. "The PLA Strategic Support Force: A 'Joint' Force for Information Operations," in *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context*, Joel Wuthnow, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, and Andrew N.D. Yang eds. Washington D.C: National Defense University Press, (2021).

Dai, Feng, Wang, Yu Gen, and Luo, Guang Yi. "Shouldering the Historic Responsibility of Pioneering and Establishing the Theater—Interview with Eastern Theater Commander Liu Yuejun." *China Military Online*. March 4, (2016).
http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/zhuanti/content/2016-03/04/content_6940918.htm

Dang, Wu and Zhang, Ke Jin. "How Does the Military Determine Preliminary Candidates for the 19th National Congress Representatives?" *China Military Online*. May 25, (2017).
http://zb.81.cn/content/2017-05/25/content_7617929_2.htm.

Ding, Shu Fan. "The PLA and COVID-19: Challenges of Logistics Mobilization After Military Reform," *Prospect & Exploration*, 18, no. 3 (2020). 2-8

Editorial Department of Shipborne Weapons. "Encirclement Warfare in the Field: Insights on the Taiwan Issue from the Russo-Ukrainian War," *Shipborne Weapons*, no. 6 (2022).47-59

Guan, Tao and Yao, Li. *The Military Geography of China's Theater Commands*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2005).

Guo, Ji Wei. *War for Biological Dominance*. Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, (2010)

Han, Wei Feng, Kang, Yong Sheng, and Kong, Ling Juan. *Combat-Oriented Military Reform*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2015).

Han, Xiao and Sun, Kejia. *Research on Issues in the Critical Period of Contemporary Chinese Military Reform*. Beijing: National Defense University Press, March, (2017).

He, Shu Yin. "PLA Daily Commentator: Comprehensively Advancing the Modernization of National Defense and the Armed Forces." *Ministry of National Defense of China*. March 21, (2023).
<http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/jmsd/16210796.html>

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

39

Huang, Ching Yen and Dai, Chih Hung. *Contemporary Russian Military Power and the War in Ukraine*. Taipei: Hanlu Book and Publishing Company, (2023).

Huang, Alexander. "Examining Research on the Chinese People's Liberation Army and the Tamkang School: A Review of 20 Years of Experience," in *Contemporary Strategic Theory and Practice*, Wong, Ming-hsien eds. New Taipei City: Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies, Tamkang University, (2011): 247-274

Li, Chun. "The 'Below-the-Neck' Reform Begins: How Military Reform Adapts to Changing Circumstances?" *China Military Online*. February 27, (2017).
http://www.81.cn/2017qglh/2017-02/27/content_7503829.htm

Li, Jun, Ma, Ming Yue, Zhou, Hong Guang, Zhao, Yang, Han, Xiao Lin, and Guo, Shu Sen. "Development Opportunities and Challenges for Division-Level Hospitals of the Joint Logistics Support Force," *Hospital Administration Journal of Chinese People's Liberation Army*, 27, no. 11, (2020).1035-1038

Li, Shu Yin, Wang, Ji Chang, and Zhang, Xi. *An Analysis of Russian Military Intelligence*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2018).

Li, Xiao Ming. "Press Conference on the Establishment of the Information Support Force." *People's Daily Online*. April 20, (2024).

<http://military.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2024/0420/c1011-40219744.html>.

Li, Ya Ming and Chen, Tai Wu. *The Deep Structure of the Communist China's Military Reform: Changes and Constants in Communist Chinese Military Thought*. Taipei: College of Political Warfare, National Defense University, (2012).

Liao, Shi Feng. "Rocket Force Commander Unusually Appointed from the Navy: Wang Houbin Takes the Role." *United Daily News*. August 1, (2023).

<https://udn.com/news/story/7331/7337967>.

Lin, Ying Yu and Liao, Tzu Hao. "RIP, SSF: Unpacking the PLA's Latest Restructuring." *The Diplomat*. April 24, (2024).

<https://thediplomat.com/diplomat-brief/2024/vol17/index.html>.

Lin, Ying Yu. "Examining PLA Combat Power Through Rocket Force Leadership Changes," *Prospect & Exploration*, 21, no. 9, (2023). 30-36

Lin, Ying Yu. "PLA Personnel Shakeups And Their Implications." *China Brief*. February 2, (2024).

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

41

<https://jamestown.org/program/pla-personnel-shakeups-and-their-implications/>

Lin, Ying Yu. "The Implications of China's Military Reforms." *The Diplomat*. March 7, (2016). <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/the-implications-of-chinas-military-reforms/>

Lin, Ying Yu. "The Missions and Scale of the PLA's Strategic Support Force," *Prospect & Exploration*, 15, no. 10 (2017). 102-128

Lin, Ying Yu. "The Role and System of the PLA Medical and Health Service System in Facing the Pandemic: A Comparison Before and After Military Reform," *Mainland China Studies*, 65, no. 3, (2022). 81-107

Lin, Ying Yu. "What the PLA Is Learning From Russia's Ukraine Invasion." *The Diplomat*. April 20, (2022). <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/what-the-pla-is-learning-from-russias-ukraine-invasion/>.

Lu, Jia Rong. "China Disbands Strategic Support Force and Establishes Information Support Force." *Central News Agency*. April 19, (2024). <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202404190314.aspx>.

Mattis, Peter. *Analyzing the Chinese Military: A Review Essay and Resource Guide on the People's Liberation Army*. South

Carolina: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, (2015).

Military Strategy Research Department, Academy of Military Sciences. *Strategic Studies*. Beijing: Academy of Military Sciences Press, (2013).

Min, Zhen Fan and Wang, Bao Cun. *The Organizational System for Constructing an Informatized Military*. Li Zhang eds. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2005).

Oriental Daily News. "Former Commander of the Strategic Support Force Transferred to Political Commissar of the Western Theater Command." Accessed January 26, 2022. https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/cnnews/20220129/bkn-20220129100225864-0129_00952_001.html

Panwar, Lt. Gen. R. S. "China's Strategic Support Force and Its Implications for India, Part I: Concept, Organisation and Space Operations." *Future Wars*. June 9, (2020). <https://futurewars.rspanwar.net/chinas-special-support-force-and-its-implications-for-india-part-i>

Reisner, Col. Markus. "Krieg in der Ukraine: Die Erfolgsgeschichte der ukrainischen Artillerie." interview by Österreichs Bundesheer. May 20, (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzAl29GI9MA>

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

43

Ren, Tian You. "An Exploration of Certain Mechanisms for Deepening National Defense and Military Reform," in *Strong Military Forum*, Chinese Military Culture Society, eds. Beijing: People's Publishing House, (2017).147-159

Royal United Services Institute. "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022." Accessed November 30,2022. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-conventional-warfighting-russias-invasion-ukraine-february-july-2022>.

Royal United Services Institute. "The Orlan Complex: Tracking the Supply Chains of Russia's Most Successful UAV." Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/orlan-complex-tracking-supply-chains-russias-most-successful-uav>.

Shao, Wei Zheng and Li, Bu Qian. *Following the Party's Command*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2014).

Tai, Ming Cheung. *China's Emergence as a Defense Technological Power*. New York: Routledge, (2012).

Wang, Ke Hai, Wang, Bing, and Cao, Zheng Rong. *Research on Integrated Joint Operations*. Beijing: PLA Publishing House, (2005): 27.

Wang, Yi Biao. "Deeply Understanding the Major Arrangements of the 20th Party Congress on Upholding the Party's Comprehensive Leadership and Strict Governance." *People's Daily Online*. January 3, (2023). <http://theory.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2023/0103/c40531-32598865.html>.

Wen Wei Po. "Commander of the Strategic Support Force Gao Jin." Accessed January 2, 2016. <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2016/01/02/CH1601020011.htm>.

Weng, Yen Ching. *The History and Military Strength of the Chinese Communist Party and Its Threat to Taiwan*. Taipei: Hsin Rui Creative Publishing House, (2023).

Wu, Chung Han. "An Analysis of the Cognitive Warfare Capabilities of the PLA Strategic Support Force," *Prospect Quarterly*, 24, no. 4, (2023).5-46

Wuthnow, Joel and Saunders, Phillip C.. *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*. Washington D.C: National Defense University Press, (2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-10.pdf>

Xiao, Tian Liang, ed. *Strategic Studies*. Beijing: National Defense University Press, (2020).

**Examining the PLA's Reform from an Organizational
Adjustment Perspective**

45

-
- Xu, Guo Xing. *Research on the Construction of Chinese Military's Information Warfare Combat Power*. Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, (2013).
- Xu, Yan. "The Farewell of the Major Military Region System from China's Military Stage," in Strong Military Strategy, Yazhou Liu, Zhi Cao, and Tiezhu Zhang, eds. Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong Chubanshe, (2016).360-377.
- Yang, Qing Gang, Qin, Zhao Ping, and Zhao, Guo Tao. "Commander of the Central Theater Command Han Weiguo: A Detailed Explanation of Seven Differences Between Theater Commands and Major Military Regions." *China Military Online*. March 7, (2016). http://www.81.cn/zbzq/2016-03/07/content_6945985.htm
- You, Kai Hsiang. "PLA Generals Who Understand Hacker Mindset Step Out; Scholar Warns Taiwan to Be Cautious in Information Warfare." *Central News Agency*. July 7, (2021). <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip/202107070053.aspx>.
- Yu, Chuan Xin, ed. *Joint Logistics Course*. Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, (2011).
- Yuan, Chih Te. *Soviet Influence in Chinese Military Thought: The Soviet Strategic Roots in CCP Military Doctrine*. Taichung: Yueh Hsiang Digital Printing Co., (2012).

Zhang, Wen Tao, “New Achievements in Military Reform: The Important Role of the Joint Logistics Support Force in Fighting the Pandemic,” *Special issue on China’s national defense force behind the fight against the pandemic*, Ordnance Industry Science Technology, no. 5 (2022). 85-90

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence:
India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication****Ren-Shan Jia,* Tung-Chieh Tsai******Abstract**

The nuclear peace thesis posits that the possession of nuclear capabilities deters full-scale war, thereby establishing a stable condition grounded in rational choice and mutual destructive balance. It has served as a foundational concept in deterrence theory, particularly within the Cold War context, to explain the restraint of great powers and the prevention of conflict escalation. However, since India and Pakistan joined the ranks of nuclear-armed states in 1998, the bilateral dynamic has not settled into strategic stability; rather, it has been marked by repeated crises and episodes of brinkmanship. This article contends that traditional nuclear deterrence theory fails to account for the persistence of localized conflicts under four structural conditions in the India-Pakistan case, including intractable sovereignty disputes, the role of third-party non-state actors, disparity in nuclear warhead stockpiles, and temporal

* Ren-Shan Jia is an Researcher Fellow at the Center for Contemporary China Studies, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan. E-mail: vin45345@gmail.com.

** Tung-Chieh Tsai is a Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Institute of International Politics, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan. E-mail: tctasi@dragon.nchu.edu.tw.

Ren-Shan Jia is the corresponding author of this article.

asymmetry in the development of nuclear capabilities. The interaction between India and Pakistan under nuclear confrontation has evolved into a pattern of limited conflict which could be called the tepid war, wherein nuclear weapons have become instruments of escalation strategy rather than guarantees of structural stability.

Keywords: India-Pakistan relations, nuclear deterrence theory, tepid war, non-state proxy, temporal asymmetry

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

49

I. Rethinking Nuclear Deterrence

Since the first use of atomic bomb at the end of World War II, conception of nuclear deterrence has become a core idea for regulating the interaction among great powers and preventing military conflict.¹ During the Cold War, the bipolar system formed by the United States and the Soviet Union gave rise to a structure of nuclear stability grounded in the logic of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD),² and then for building a worldwide nonproliferation regime, which both gradually established a state of peace premised on a balance of destructive capabilities and, in turn, gave rise to the nuclear peace thesis in international relations theory.³ Scholars such as Schelling, Jervis, and Waltz have argued that nuclear weapons possess a structural balancing function that effectively reduces the risk of war and exerts a clear deterrent effect against conflict escalation.⁴ However, since India and Pakistan respectively conducted nuclear tests and formally became nuclear-armed states in 1998, this development not only threatened the existing nonproliferation regime which based on the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) signed in

¹ Robert Powell, "Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense," *International Security*, 27, no. 4, (2003): 86-118.

² Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

³ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 17-21.

⁴ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 35-40; Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics*, 31, no. 2, (1979): 303-304; Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better* (London: IISS Adelphi Papers, 1981), 1-12.

1968, their bilateral relationship has also failed to conform to the stable conditions posited by the *nuclear peace thesis*. Instead, it has been repeatedly punctuated by crisis of military confrontation, revealing the limitations of deterrence theory when applied to non-Western contexts.

The India-Pakistan confrontation offers not just a region-specific anomaly, but uncovers a fact that the deterrence theory developed through Cold War experience may not cover the broader structural deficiencies in contemporary situation, particularly its inability to account for variations in institutional conditions, actor composition, power distribution, and so on. For instance, after both India and Pakistan acquired nuclear capabilities since 1998, a series of crises which could be regarded as so-called *tepid war*—the situation between hot war and cold war—including the 1999 Kargil War, the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the 2019 Pulwama incident and the 2025 conflict following the Pahalgam attack, all events demonstrated that nuclear weapons failed to produce the expected stabilizing effect. Instead, these events exposed the contradiction between the hypothesis of deterrence and the empirical reality of repeated conflict in this regional bilateral relations.⁵

⁵ Recent data from SIPRI (2025) and regional assessments from Pakistani scholarship (ISSI) further suggest that nuclear competition in South Asia continues to intensify rather than stabilize, reinforcing the empirical divergence from classical deterrence expectations. *See, for example*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 2025*:

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

51

Theoretically speaking, though states in a condition of mutual assured destruction cannot credibly threaten to launch a massive nuclear attack deliberately, they may still be able to credibly make “threats that leave something to chance” which imply that the military crisis or limited war would be possible.⁶ It is worth to note that even though crises are often regarded as a kind of brinkmanship or a “risk-maximizing approach” in which a state “tends toward maximizing and accepting mutual military risk,⁷” not only most states as rational actor are very reluctant to press on and raise the crisis, but very cautious when using crisis as a diplomatic tool. Besides, the cases in Cold War period also point out that the nuclear powers often chose proxy warfare as an indirect way to deal with mutual competition but not confront each other directly, and that may be why most crises were under control finally.⁸

In sum, as one of the most institutionally influential strategic approaches in post-Cold War international relations, deterrence theory actually rests on the core logic of using certain punitive

Armaments, Disarmament and International Security; and Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, “Nuclear Year 2025 in Review,” Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), 2026.; Zafar Khan, *Pakistan’s Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London: Routledge, 2015), 42-48.

⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 187.

⁷ Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), 10-11.

⁸ Seyom Brown, “Purposes and Pitfalls of War by Proxy: A Systemic Analysis,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 27, no. 2, (2016): 243-257.

threats to induce behavioral restraint. It intends to emphasize the catastrophic consequences, thereby compel the adversaries to anticipate unacceptable losses in the military escalation, and thus bring the deterrent effects.⁹ Basically, there are two types of nuclear deterrence: deterrence by punishment which threatens to inflict damage or retaliate if one launch attacked, and deterrence by denial which seeks to undermine the adversary's incentive to escalate by increasing the costs and reducing the likelihood of success.¹⁰ In the Cold War period, deterrence by punishment was dominant and given rise to some key concepts such as credible minimum deterrence and second-strike capability. Then until right now, the deterrence theories are largely predicated on following conditions: first, all actors possess clearly articulated and stable intentions along with coherent decision-making capacity; second, nuclear capabilities are symmetrical and reliable; and third, there are effective communication channels and enough escalation control mechanisms existing before and during crises.

This pattern of limited conflict under conditions of nuclear deterrence has been widely conceptualized in the literature as the stability-instability paradox. Originally articulated by Glenn Snyder, the paradox suggests that stability at the strategic nuclear level may generate instability at lower levels of conflict, as

⁹ Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 5-10.

¹⁰ Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 98-101.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

53

mutually deterred states perceive reduced risks in engaging in limited military actions. As Snyder noted, “the greater the stability of the ‘strategic’ balance of terror, the lower the stability at its lower levels of violence.”¹¹ Subsequent scholarship has further applied this concept to regional nuclear dyads, particularly in South Asia, where nuclear deterrence has not prevented recurring crises and limited wars. The 1999 Kargil conflict, for example, has been widely interpreted as a manifestation of the stability-instability paradox, in which nuclear deterrence constrained full-scale war while enabling sub-strategic military engagement.¹² Building on this literature, this study does not seek to propose an entirely new theoretical framework, but rather to examine how the India-Pakistan case reflects and adapts the logic of the stability-instability paradox under conditions of asymmetry, non-state actors, and limited crisis-management mechanisms.

While classical deterrence theory is largely derived from the bipolar stability observed during the Cold War, particularly in the context of the United States-Soviet Union rivalry, its assumptions are only partially applicable to the contemporary India-Pakistan nuclear dyad. During the Cold War, deterrence stability was

¹¹ Christopher J. Watterson, “Competing Interpretations of the Stability-Instability Paradox: The Case of the Kargil War,” *The Nonproliferation Review* (2017), pp. 2-3; Glenn Snyder, “The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror,” in Paul Seabury (ed.), *The Balance of Power* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), pp. 198-199.

¹² Christopher J. Watterson, “Competing Interpretations of the Stability-Instability Paradox: The Case of the Kargil War,” *The Nonproliferation Review* (2017), pp. 2-8.

reinforced by relatively mature institutional mechanisms, including established communication channels such as the Washington-Moscow hotline, as well as arms control agreements that enhanced transparency and predictability. By contrast, the India-Pakistan relationship lacks similarly robust and institutionalized crisis-management frameworks. Although some confidence-building measures exist, they remain limited in scope and are often undermined during periods of heightened tension. The absence of reliable communication mechanisms, combined with recurring crises and short decision-making timelines, increases the risks of misperception and inadvertent escalation. Consequently, while deterrence may persist at a basic level in South Asia, its stability is more fragile and contingent compared to the Cold War model, highlighting the need to reassess the applicability of classical deterrence assumptions in this regional context. Yet, in regions characterized by asymmetric power structures, domestic governance failures, or deeply embedded proxy behavior, it is clear that the nuclear deterrence will face structural constraints such as indeterminate responsibility and uncontrollable escalation,¹³ which will underscore the applicability of nuclear deterrence.

Take South Asia for example, though many people claim that, due to India and Pakistan never happen war in narrow sense since

¹³ Nina Tannenwald, "The Vanishing Nuclear Taboo? How Disarmament Fell Apart," *Foreign Affairs*, 97, no. 6, (2018): 16-24.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

55

1998, it means the deterrence theory work indeed.¹⁴ This article still contends that the India-Pakistan confrontation cannot be adequately explained by conventional nuclear deterrence conception, because they caught in dispute too frequent and usually fight each other directly though all events never upgrade to large-scale conflict. Actually, the India-Pakistan case differs from the logic of deterrence which developed through the Cold War experiences in at least four structural conditions: first, the sovereignty debate and mobilization of national identity surrounding the Kashmir dispute, which obstructs strategic rationality from guiding decision-making; second, the active role of non-state actors entangled with state power structures, which undermines the clarity of deterrent boundaries and the logic of reciprocal accountability; third, asymmetries in nuclear deployment between India and Pakistan, which prevent to establish a stable balance of destructive capabilities, thereby destabilizing deterrent thresholds and producing divergent risk perceptions; and fourth, temporal disparities in the maturation of nuclear capabilities, which place the two states in an asynchronous deterrence posture, resulting in a misaligned structure of mutual deterrence.

¹⁴ Sharaq Hussain, "Nuclear Deterrence and the Prevention of War: The Case Study of India and Pakistan," *Journal of Peace and Diplomacy*, 1, no. 1, (2020): 47-56.

A. Intractable Sovereignty Dispute:

The basic assumption of nuclear deterrence theory is that decision-makers possess rational choice capabilities and are able to weigh risks against costs and benefits when choosing escalation and restraint. However, when a conflict refers to state legitimacy and national historical narratives, above assumption may be undermined fundamentally. For India and Pakistan, the Kashmir issue has long transcended just as territorial dispute, but a crucial symbol within each state's national mythology,¹⁵ and often perceived as a non-negotiable cornerstone of regime legitimacy and national identity. When sovereignty claims are regarded as the sacred and absolute values, compromise becomes tantamount to state's self-negation, and strategic choices are thereby severed from rational calculation. Under such conditions, nuclear weapons cease to function as instruments of risk suppression and even instead become means of asserting national will and political resolve. As a result, the deterrent mechanism loses its capacity to serve as an institutional stabilizer, and its normative assumptions collapse accordingly.

¹⁵ Sumit Ganguly and Kanti Bajpai, "Kashmir: A Strategic Crisis or Ethnic Nationalism?" in *Subnational Movements in South Asia*, eds. Subrata K. Mitra and R. Alison Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1996), 125-139.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

57

B. Third-Party Non-State Actors:

In India-Pakistan nuclear standoff, non-state armed actors are not merely external strategic variables, but have become institutionally embedded in the national security architectures. Organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, though nominally as independent units, in practice maintain strategically ambiguous ties with Pakistan's military and intelligence apparatus,¹⁶ and has produced an unaccountable yet effective influence. Within this structure, hostile actions tend to occur outside formal state command chains, making it difficult for India to identify responsible actors or legitimate targets for retaliation after an attack which in turn undermines the accountability framework upon which deterrence mechanisms rely. When strategic signals cannot be transmitted clearly, the very notion of deterrence as assumed by nuclear theory is disrupted, and the logic of standoff deteriorates into institutional disequilibrium.

C. Disparity in Nuclear Warhead Stockpiles:

The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence hinges on the credibility of retaliation—that is, the assurance that both states

¹⁶ S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Jihad Paradox: Pakistan and Islamist Militancy in South Asia," *International Security*, 37, no. 1, (2012): 111-141.

possess the capability to inflict unacceptable damage. Although India and Pakistan are both nuclear-armed, a significant asymmetry exists in the size of warhead stockpiles, redundancy of deployment, and reserve capacity.¹⁷ India's nuclear program is more mature technologically and maintains a stable and expansive nuclear posture, affording it greater capacity to absorb and delay crises. In contrast, Pakistan relies on a logic of limited quantity and rapid deployment, and this structural imbalance diminishes the credibility of its second-strike capability. As a result, deterrent signaling in this bilateral relations becomes fraught with operational fragility and diminished predictability.

D. Temporal Asymmetry in Developing Nuclear Capabilities:

Although India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests almost simultaneously in 1998, their trajectories in nuclear capability development have diverged significantly over time.¹⁸ Since the 1970s, India has pursued the construction of triad nuclear power and a civilian-control system and emphasized the separation between conventional and nuclear force during crises. In contrast,

¹⁷ Christoph Bluth, "India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Nuclear Deterrence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 22, no. 3, (2010): 387-406.

¹⁸ Rodney W. Jones, *Minimum Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: An Overview* (Reston: Policy Architects International, 2001).

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

59

Pakistan's nuclear policy has been limited by technology and cost, favoring low thresholds and highly flexible deployment strategies. This institutional disparity and asynchronous development have obstructed the formation of symmetrical risk perceptions and escalation pacing between both sides. As result, strategic signals are often misinterpreted due to temporal misperceptions of intent, then led to undermine the institutional mutual trust which required for effective nuclear deterrence.

II. Kashmir Issue as Sovereignty Dispute

As the central point of contention between India and Pakistan, the Kashmir issue extends far beyond a territorial or geopolitical dispute, but embedded in sovereignty narrative and national myth deeply. The Kashmir conflict was a legacy of the partition of India in 1947. Both India and Pakistan claimed sovereignty over Kashmir leading to regional wars in 1947-48, 1965 and 1999. A UN resolution in 1948 has proposed the withdrawal of both Pakistani and Indian forces from Kashmir, however, it was refused by both countries.¹⁹ For India, Kashmir tests the viability of its secular federalism—whether a Muslim-majority region can be integrated into a unified national identity. Then for Pakistan, Kashmir is seen as the unfinished symbol of Partition and a historical extension of its identity as an

¹⁹ J. C. Aggarwal and S. P. Agrawal, *Modern History of Jammu and Kashmir* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1995), 107-112.

Islamic fortress and the embodiment of its religious legitimacy.²⁰ As a result, both states position Kashmir conflict as a core coordinate of national identity, regarding its political value as fundamentally non-negotiable. Once sovereignty claims become integrated into the politics of identity rather than confined to geostrategic competition, the nuclear deterrence theory—originally premised on risk aversion and rational cost-benefit calculation—fails to account for the underlying logic of decision-making and mobilization in such a context.²¹

Nuclear deterrence theory posits that nuclear-armed states will choose restraint under the shadow of mutual destruction, with strategic behavior oriented toward the avoidance of unacceptable damage. The deterrent mechanism operates through both *deterrence by punishment* and *deterrence by denial*, aiming to preserve adversarial predictability and risk aversion.²² Above concept rooted in the Cold War experience of U.S.-Soviet confrontation and maintains that as long as both states possess enough credible second-strike capabilities and stable

²⁰ Sumit Ganguly, "Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency: Political Mobilization and Institutional Decay," *International Security*, 21, no. 2, (1996): 76-107; C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28-35.

²¹ Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, no. 1, (2009): 21-42.

²² Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 12-15; Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 112-115.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

61

command-and-control systems, any act of escalation would be interpreted as irrational.²³ However, policy behavior surrounding Kashmir—no matter India or Pakistan—does not conform to this logic. The impetus for conflict often stems from historical memory, religious division, and concern about regime legitimacy, rather than from conventional strategic and security thinking. Both India's internal discourse of unification nationalism and Pakistan's emphasis on Islamic authenticity render Kashmir as symbolic issue with no space for compromise.²⁴ Even with nuclear capabilities embedded in both states' strategic frameworks, these do not necessarily constrain the range of policy options. When state decision-making is rooted mainly in political identity and imagination of national will, the behavioral stability and institutional constraints assumed by nuclear deterrence would fail to exert its effective influence.

Moreover, threat perceptions are often used to justify policies which are adopted not because they address an external security threat, but because they suit the requirements of bureaucratic agencies and vested interests in society, and not to mention that it may be different for defining the threat in between the superpower and middle power. In contrast to two superpowers and the European medium-sized nuclear powers in the Cold War

²³ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 93-100; Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 276-281.

²⁴ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 89-94.

period, small regional nuclear powers like India and Pakistan tended to adopt a policy of “minimum deterrence.”²⁵ It refers to the concept where a nation maintains a nuclear arsenal solely to deter from nuclear attack and claims the “no first use” (NFU) principle with an constrained second strike capability. Since the minimal deterrence mission is not to deter, for example, a conventional attack by an enemy, it means the military conflict is not avoidable, especially for a sensitive sovereignty issue such like Kashmir.²⁶

Except Kashmir as an issue with highly political sensitivity, more critically, India and Pakistan have failed to establish a stable and durable crisis management mechanism, rendering both states unable to engage in institutionalized de-escalation during episodes of sudden conflict. During the Cold War, instruments such as the hotline system, crisis notification protocols, and third-party mediation frameworks played pivotal roles in stabilizing confrontations between U.S. and Soviet Union, as evidenced by their effectiveness during the Cuban and the Berlin crises for example. These mechanisms served as stabilizing supplements to the deterrence regime.²⁷ By contrast, though India and Pakistan

²⁵ Christoph Bluth, “India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Nuclear Deterrence,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 22, no. 3, (2010): 387-406.

²⁶ Zafar Khan, “The Changing Contours of Minimum Deterrence in South Asia,” *Policy Perspectives*, 13, no. 1, (2016): 77-96.

²⁷ David Holloway, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 197-201; Michael Krepon et al., *Crisis Prevention*,

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

63

have periodically proposed bilateral dialogue frameworks and conflict early-warning systems since 1998, such initiatives have largely remained symbolic declarations and have not been translated into functioning, routinized risk management institutions. The Kashmir issue is defined by a complex interplay between the internal political situation in the Kashmir Valley and the relationship between India and Pakistan, and the situation is further complicated by the fact that India, Pakistan, and Kashmiri political organizations hold what appear to be irreconcilable ideological positions regarding Kashmir.²⁸ Following the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and especially the 2025 crisis due to terrorist attack, both countries approached the brink of war, with escalation processes driven entirely by domestic political pressure and the tempo of military mobilization. Under such conditions, even when nuclear weapons possess latent deterrent power, their operational logic cannot be effectively activated through the existing institutional structure. Consequently, the efficacy of nuclear deterrence becomes subordinated to the absence of crisis management capacity and institutional strength.

Confidence-Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1995), 5-12.

²⁸ Chitralekha Zutshi, "India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Issue: 1947 and Beyond," *Education about Asia*, 14, no. 2, (2009): 13.

III. How Non-State Actors Undermine Deterrence Mechanisms

In contrast to the rigidity due to sovereign symbolism, another critical factor in the India-Pakistan standoff lies in the role of non-state armed actors. In fact, the functional premise of deterrence theory rests on the clear identification of responsible actors and deterrent targets, along with the establishment of a predictable logic of retaliation. In the India-Pakistan context, however, Pakistan has long relied on armed units such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed to exert indirect pressure.²⁹ These actors maintain ambivalent ties with Pakistan's military agencies such as the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) while nominally external to the state apparatus.³⁰ The character of ambiguous agency enables their actions outside the conventional responsibility, leaving India unable to determine whether Pakistan was stakeholder in such attacks. Once the chain of accountability disrupted, the deterrence regime will be shaken and give rise to what may be termed institutionally fractured deterrence.

²⁹ Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is an Islamist militant organization driven by Salafi jihadist ideology which was founded in 1985-86 with funding from Osama bin Laden. Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) is a Deobandi jihadist Islamist militant group active in Kashmir since 2000 and devote to separate Jammu and Kashmir from India then integrate into Pakistan.

³⁰ C. Christine Fair, *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 47-66.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

65

Since the Cold War, deterrence theory has rested on the fundamental assumptions that actors are identifiable, accountable, and subject to retaliation. Only when actors are clearly defined and singular can deterrent signals be effectively directed toward specific targets; conversely, if the threat lies outside the formal state system, the legitimacy and precision of retaliatory actions will become compromised.³¹ The nuclear deterrence mechanism depends on delineated escalation thresholds, it allows the adversaries to evaluate the consequences and thereby exercise self-restraint.³² However, in the India-Pakistan case, non-state armed actors have repeatedly intervened to escalate bilateral tensions. Their actions are neither formally ordered by the state nor entirely independent of official support, but rather occupy the grey zone between strategic ambiguity and plausible deniability,³³ and result to undermine the clarity of deterrent signaling and the responsiveness of retaliatory options. Moreover, Pakistan has gradually developed a highly institutionalized logic for the use of proxies since the 1990s, leveraging non-state units to launch low-intensity attacks aiming to exert pressure on India, divert military deployments, and elevate international attention to the

³¹ Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*, 4-9.

³² Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 109-116.

³³ Michael Krepon and Julia Thompson, *Deterrence Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2013), 27-31.

Kashmir issue.³⁴ These proxies—including Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Hizbul Mujahideen—present themselves as religious militant groups, but in practice maintain long-standing relationships with Pakistan’s military institutions like ISI.³⁵ For India, this strategic ambiguity not only weakens the legitimacy of deterrent responses, but also constitutes obstacle to formulating proportional retaliation. Proxy behavior, therefore, is not merely a geostrategic tactic but a structural disruptor of deterrence stability.

In December 2001, five armed assailants attacked the Indian Parliament, resulting in nine deaths. The Indian government immediately accused Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed of orchestrating the assault and the instigation behind the scenes by Pakistan. This incident triggered the largest military mobilization between two states since the 1971 war, with over one million troops deployed along the border.³⁶ Despite the nuclearized environment, the Indian government faced a strategic dilemma over whether to retaliate. Because the attackers did not belong to Pakistan’s regular armed forces and their actions were marked by

³⁴ Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 72-75.

³⁵ Daniel Byman, “Passive Sponsors of Terrorism,” *Survival*, 47, no. 4, (2005): 117-144; C. Christine Fair, *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 48-73.

³⁶ P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis of 2001-2002* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 5-9.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

67

a high degree of plausible deniability, India struggled to justify a retaliatory response that would not be seen by the international community as a disproportionate escalation. Meanwhile, President Pervez Musharraf swiftly denied Pakistan's involvement and called for restraint.³⁷ In this case, non-state actors not only served as instruments of strategic escalation but, by operating outside the boundaries of international accountability, also rendered the retaliatory chain required for deterrence inoperative. Although nuclear weapons provide the material basis for retaliatory deterrence, they fail to deliver strategic punishment against actors operating in ambiguity, thus eroding the institutional foundations upon which deterrence theory relies.

The November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks exposed the institutional dislocation within the deterrence logic of the India-Pakistan standoff. The four-day assault which orchestrated by Lashkar-e-Taiba and supported by Pakistan financially claimed over 170 lives, with attackers infiltrating via sea routes and targeting multiple civilian sites, drawing global media attention and provoking widespread outrage within India.³⁸ Yet, as in the 2001 Parliament attack, India did not choose to launch military retaliation against Pakistan, but instead for diplomatic protest and international exposure. This constrained escalation decision

³⁷ Ashley J. Tellis, *The Lessons of the 2001-2002 Crisis for Indian Military Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 4-6.

³⁸ Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, *The Siege: The Attack on the Taj* (London: Penguin, 2013), 101-129.

illustrates that, even when retaliation is both motivated and strategically viable, India remains constrained when responding to proxy attacks. In the same time, the potential restraint exerted by the United States also intensified the strategic pressure in India's decision-making,³⁹ which let the non-state actors able to repeatedly initiate high-intensity provocations without bearing proportional retaliatory costs. As a result, the effectiveness of the strategic deterrence mechanism is eroded, weakening both nuclear stability and the predictability of state behavior.

From the perspective of strategic signaling, the inherent ambiguity of proxy actors poses a structural threat to the integrity of deterrence mechanisms. Basically speaking, deterrence logic depends on the discernibility of signals, the responsiveness of actors, and the predictability of escalation. However, in conflict patterns dominated by proxies, the origin of attacks is often difficult to identify in real time, and responsibility remains blurred, leaving decision-makers trapped in a dilemma of signal interpretation. For deterrence to occur, the consequences of hostile action must be attributable to a specific actor, without that, deterrence cannot be activated.⁴⁰ In the India-Pakistan standoff, incidents such as the 2001 Parliament attack and the 2008

³⁹ Moeed Yusuf, *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 123-130.

⁴⁰ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 39-42.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

69

Mumbai attacks exemplify phenomena of signal distortion and deterrence dislocation: although the threat of nuclear retaliation exists, it lacks a corresponding target, resulting in a structural rupture between signal sender and receiver.⁴¹ Over time, when deterrence mechanisms are deprived of clearly identifiable response targets, their stability gradually deteriorates, and their institutional function as a safeguard against escalation becomes increasingly untenable.

For India, the difficult choice is that, in the face of proxy attacks, if opts to retaliate against targets within Pakistani territory, it risks crossing the nuclear threshold and triggering full-scale conflict; if exercises restraint, it risks encouraging an adversarial expectation of tolerance and institutionalization of low-intensity provocations. This creates a strategic dilemma in which retaliation lacks appeal while restraint proves ineffective, paralyzing India's capacity for action within the deterrence framework.⁴² Since 2001, the Indian military has proposed limited escalation strategies such as the Cold Start Doctrine, aimed at enabling rapid punitive strikes against proxy actors without breaching the nuclear threshold. However, such doctrines have struggled in

⁴¹ Rod Lyon and Christine Leah, "Deterrence and Non-State Actors: Theory and Practice," *Security Challenges*, 5, no. 4, (2009): 49-60.

⁴² Walter Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security*, 32, no. 3, (2007): 158-190.

implementation due to the ambiguous nature of escalation risks and the pressure of international scrutiny.⁴³

IV. Deterrence Instability under Nuclear Asymmetry

In recent years, global nuclear developments have exhibited a paradoxical trend: although the total number of nuclear warheads has slightly declined due to the dismantlement of retired weapons by the United States and Russia, the number of operational and deployable warheads continues to increase, reflecting the acceleration of nuclear modernization and renewed arms competition. Until 2025, the global nuclear inventory stands at approximately 12,241 warheads, of which around 9,614 are maintained in military stockpiles for potential operational use.⁴⁴

In South Asia, the nuclear balance between India and Pakistan reflects a dynamic of mutual competition rather than unilateral dominance. India possesses approximately 180 nuclear warheads and continues to advance its nuclear triad capabilities, while Pakistan maintains around 170 warheads and is actively developing diversified delivery systems, including ballistic and cruise missiles as well as sea-based platforms.⁴⁵ From a Pakistani

⁴³ Muhammad Tehsin, "Nuclear Doctrine and Deterrence Stability in South Asia," *Global Social Sciences Review*, 6, no. 6, (2019): 525-530.

⁴⁴ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 2025: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), 177.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 181-182.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

71

perspective, India's expanding nuclear arsenal and military modernization are widely regarded as destabilizing factors that intensify the regional security dilemma and undermine strategic stability.⁴⁶ These regional assessments further highlight the persistent risk of escalation under conditions of nuclear competition.

Another institutional challenge in the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff arises from the asymmetric reality of nuclear capabilities. Stable deterrence, as assumed by nuclear theory, presupposes a balanced structure in which both sides possess a minimum credible deterrent, particularly in the form of second-strike capability. However, India maintains a significantly larger and more stable reserve of warheads and delivery systems. Its nuclear triad has reached a mature state since being formalized in 2003. In contrast, Pakistan still centered on tactical weapons which emphasizing low thresholds, high mobility and forward deployment.⁴⁷ This asymmetry in capability has resulted in divergent perceptions of nuclear thresholds, retaliatory costs, and strategic stability. For India, nuclear weapons function as a last-resort symbol; for Pakistan, they potentially serve as tactical instruments of preemption in the face of conventional military inferiority. As a result, deterrent signals fall into a

⁴⁶ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "Nuclear Year 2025 in Review" (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2026), 4.

⁴⁷ Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 95-103.

dual-interpretation dilemma, eroding both their credibility and strategic coherence.⁴⁸

Deterrence theory has long assumed that once nuclear-armed adversaries in the international system attain a certain level of destructive capability, they will enter a stable balance of power. This logic, grounded in the concept of minimum credible deterrence (MCD), holds that as long as one side possesses the capacity to inflict unacceptable retaliation on the other, strategic deterrence can be achieved.⁴⁹ However, this simplified model often neglects the institutional conditions underpinning deterrence in practice—particularly when disparities exist in actual deployment capabilities, crisis command-and-control systems, and the transparency of nuclear policy. In such cases, parity exists in form but not in substance.⁵⁰ Although India and Pakistan both conducted nuclear tests in 1998 and are formally categorized as nuclear states, a closer examination of their material capabilities and institutional structures reveals a pronounced asymmetry in their capacity to sustain deterrence stability. If nuclear parity is not grounded in institutional maturity and shared risk perception, its stabilizing logic cannot be maintained. On the contrary, it may

⁴⁸ Zulfqar Khan, "The Changing Dynamics of India-Pakistan Deterrence," *Pakistan Horizon*, 66, no. 4, (2013): 1-19.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 42-47.

⁵⁰ Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 19-26.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

73

become a source of escalation risk due to strategic miscalculation and misjudgment of adversarial intent.⁵¹

The core differences in India and Pakistan's nuclear postures are most evident in the disparities in warhead reserves, delivery capabilities, and underlying strategic intent. According to estimates by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), India has consistently maintained a greater number of nuclear warheads and a larger array of delivery platforms than Pakistan. India's deployment model is oriented toward strategic deterrence, characterized by stability and deliberate delay capabilities.⁵² In contrast, Pakistan's nuclear posture is shaped by a logic of compensation for India's strategic superiority, emphasizing high mobility, low thresholds, and rapid-response tactical nuclear deployments. The two states also diverge significantly in their interpretations of the MCD concept: India tends to view it as a form of political deterrence and a last resort, while Pakistan treats it as a strategic substitute for conventional military shortfalls. This conceptual divergence means that although both states may nominally possess retaliatory capabilities, they have failed to

⁵¹ Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, 21, no. 3, (1997): 54-86.

⁵² Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Nuclear Notebook," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Accessed June 6, 2025.
<https://thebulletin.org/nuclear-risk/nuclear-weapons/nuclear-notebook/>.

establish a stable structure of risk symmetry and policy restraint.⁵³ The effectiveness of deterrence relies not solely on destructive capacity but also on shared perceptions of what constitutes nuclear escalation. When deployment logics are misaligned, deterrence expectations become distorted in tandem.

Since the end of the Cold War, India has progressively developed a nuclear strategy characterized by institutionalization, delayed escalation, and stable deterrence. Its policy framework explicitly separates conventional military operations from nuclear deterrence and emphasizes the principle of *No First Use* (NFU), thereby establishing a stable threshold for use and clear signaling expectations.⁵⁴ Moreover, following the release of the Draft Nuclear Doctrine, India has advanced its deployment of a nuclear triad—comprising land-based missiles, air-launched cruise missiles, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles—to ensure the credibility and survivability for second-strike capability,⁵⁵ and constructed a decision-execution chain Institutionally composed of the Cabinet Committee on Security and the Strategic Forces Command, with the National Security Advisor responsible for the final consultative process on nuclear use which reflects a clear

⁵³ Ashley J. Tellis, *Pakistan's Nuclear Posture: Conflicts with India's Strategic Restraint* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), 17-21.

⁵⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. *Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine*. August 17, 1999. <http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/70efe4/pdf/>.

⁵⁵ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict*, 104-115.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

75

civilian-command nuclear control system.⁵⁶ Above designs embody India's conception of minimum credible deterrence, which is not aimed at achieving nuclear superiority or threatening preemption, but rather at maintaining a credible yet restrained posture that minimizes the risks of miscalculation and escalation.

By contrast, since acquiring nuclear capability, Pakistan has consistently adopted a highly compensatory deployment and policy logic, treating nuclear weapons as an institutional countermeasure to India's conventional military superiority. Its nuclear strategy not only refrains from committing to a *No First Use* (NFU) pledge, but instead emphasizes early use and low-threshold retaliation through tactical deployment. Since 2011, Pakistan has openly developed tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs), such as the short-range Nasr missile, explicitly designed to achieve strategic deterrent effects at the battlefield level, thereby offsetting its spatial disadvantages in conventional military deployments.⁵⁷ Moreover, Pakistan's nuclear decision-making process remain highly concentrated within a narrow military elite, with weak civilian oversight and a lack of transparent regulatory frameworks. Its command system remains opaque and insulated from public scrutiny.⁵⁸ In this institutional environment, decisions regarding nuclear escalation are more likely to be driven

⁵⁶ Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security*, 28-35.

⁵⁷ Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, 365-371.

⁵⁸ Cheema, *Indian Nuclear Deterrence: Its Evolution, Development and Implications for South Asian Security*, 270-275.

by battlefield pressures and expectations of escalation than by institutionalized risk assessments or political restraint. This reliance on nuclear weapons as instruments of forward escalation and tactical utility transforms deterrence from a stability-oriented mechanism into a compensatory tool for military disadvantage, thereby magnifying structural asymmetries in threat perception and complicating India's response calculus.⁵⁹

The asymmetry between India and Pakistan is not limited to disparities in quantity and deployment logic, but fundamentally rooted in the obvious historical time lag. India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 and began formulating a triad deployment as early as the 1980s, gradually establishing its nuclear governance centered on civilian control, strategic decentralization, and command-and-control mechanisms.⁶⁰ By contrast, Pakistan's nuclear development was reactive and compensatory with first nuclear tests swiftly in 1998 for response to India. The process was heavily dominated by the military and lacked sustained institutional accumulation. This first-mover versus latecomer developmental trajectory has resulted in divergent understandings of nuclear capability, differing perceptions of risk, and asynchronous escalation pacing. India's institutional structure

⁵⁹ Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities," *International Security*, 43, no. 3, (2019): 7-52.

⁶⁰ George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 321-329.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

77

incorporates mechanisms for crisis delay and escalation restraint, whereas Pakistan relies more on mobile deployment and strategic ambiguity to maintain initiative. Thus, despite both states possessing nuclear weapons, they are engaged in a standoff marked by differing levels of institutional maturity and operational tempo. This temporal asymmetry not only complicates the interpretation of deterrent signals but also amplifies institutional friction and escalation uncertainty, making it one of the most critical structural sources of instability in the India-Pakistan nuclear confrontation.

Under conditions of institutional asymmetry, both countries frequently experience misalignment in their interpretation of strategic signals and perceptions of escalation risk. India is more likely to view nuclear weapons as a last-resort option, expecting its adversary to respond in a similarly rational and restrained tempo. However, Pakistan may regard tactical nuclear weapons as necessary and usable tool for conventional escalation. This cognitive rupture prevents the formation of shared escalation thresholds and mutually understood risk tolerance zones, resulting in either over-interpretation or underestimation. More critically, in the absence of institutional conditions capable of synchronizing escalation pacing and behavioral expectations, acts of escalation cease to be exceptional and instead risk becoming normalized within the strategic structure. As a result, the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff enters a structural paradox in which escalation

becomes acceptable, yet its outcomes remain uncontrollable.⁶¹ It means that the deterrence mechanisms not only fail to stabilize the potential conflict, but may serve as institutional triggers for escalation paradoxically.

V. Temporal Asymmetry: The Risk of Miscalculation from Asynchronous Nuclear Development

Although both India and Pakistan conducted formal nuclear tests in 1998, their trajectories in nuclear technological development and strategic institutionalization exhibit significant temporal gaps. Since the “Smiling Buddha” test in 1974, India has progressively developed its nuclear command structure that distinguishes between conventional and nuclear force applications, and institutional mechanisms such as the National Security Advisor and the Strategic Forces Command. In contrast, Pakistan's nuclear decision-making has long been dominated by a small military elite, lacking institutionalized command, transparent strategic planning, and a clearly articulated nuclear use policy.⁶² When the timeline of nuclear development and the maturity of strategic institutions are misaligned, the two states develop divergent perceptions of escalation thresholds and risk

⁶¹ Michael Krepon, “The Stability-Instability Paradox in South Asia,” in *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, eds. Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2006), 10-13.

⁶² Cheema, *Indian Nuclear Deterrence: Its Evolution, Development and Implications for South Asian Security*, 244-250.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

79

expectations, preventing the establishment of a stable signaling loop. Although both owned nuclear weapons, the asymmetry in institutional foundations impedes the formation of effective deterrent structures and instead magnifies the risk of miscalculation and inadvertent escalation.

The core logic of nuclear deterrence theory is founded on the principle of equivalence: only when rival states possess comparable nuclear capabilities, command-and-control structures, and escalation pacing can deterrent threats operate in a stable manner. Equivalence refers not only to the mutual assurance of physical destruction, but to the transparent transmission of escalation intent, credible signaling of retaliatory will, and similar perceptions of risk.⁶³ Under this premise, the effectiveness of deterrence depends on a shared understanding regarding escalation thresholds and the tempo of response. If the target of deterrence lacks institutional stability, deployment transparency, and clearly defined rules of use, even formal possession of nuclear capability may be insufficient to prevent misinterpretation thus triggering an escalation spiral. The central problem in the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff lies in the fact that, despite both being nuclear-armed, they are separated by a temporal gap in strategic institutional development, which prevents deterrence from operating as a closed and stable loop. The structural foundation that enabled deterrence theory to function during the

⁶³ Freedman, *Deterrence*, 42-47.

Cold War is fundamentally challenged in South Asia, with the core driver being nuclear asymmetry over time.⁶⁴

The developmental trajectories of India and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities reveal a clear first-mover versus latecomer structure. After conducting its first nuclear test in 1974, India advanced its nuclear triad in the 1980s and gradually constructing a control system with an emphasis on escalation pacing and institutional restraint.⁶⁵ Its nuclear policy centers on the principle of No First Use, with a deployment posture oriented around long-range strategic missiles, supported by the development of submarine-based launch capabilities—collectively forming a stable, delayed, and predictable deterrence structure. In contrast, Pakistan began rapid retaliatory development only after India's 1998 tests, with much of its technical capacity reportedly supported by China and North Korea. Its deployments focus on short-range tactical missiles with an explicit policy of retaining the option for first use, and a nuclear command structure long dominated by the military.⁶⁶ This asymmetric trajectory has resulted in divergent perceptions of pacing, risk expectations, and response speed during nuclear crises: India emphasizes delayed escalation and second-strike capability, while Pakistan tends to

⁶⁴ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict*, 78-83.

⁶⁵ Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, 267-281.

⁶⁶ Feroz H. Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 362-369.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

81

treat nuclear capability as a frontline escalation and coercive tool. The temporal gap in institutional maturity constitutes a structural foundation for strategic misjudgment and uncontrolled escalation.

Pakistan's nuclear development trajectory and institutional arrangements reveal a strategic orientation marked by high compensatory logic and operational prioritization. Following the 1998 test, Pakistan's deployment rapidly shifted toward short-range tactical nuclear missiles with low thresholds and high mobility as core design features. These systems are intended to deter Indian conventional incursions through battlefield-level deterrence. For instance, the Nasr missile has been positioned as a countermeasure to India's Cold Start Doctrine, aiming to generate uncertainty at the frontlines by raising expectations of rapid escalation.⁶⁷ However, in terms of command-and-control systems, Pakistan continues to rely on a military-dominated structure without civilian oversight. It has persistently refrained from providing clear external signals.⁶⁸ Although enhances flexibility and rapid responsiveness, it severely undermines the predictability and credibility of deterrent signals. Consequently, the adversary struggles to accurately interpret Pakistan's escalation intent and its boundaries for risk control. When one side deploys nuclear capabilities to manufacture tactical uncertainty, while the other relies on institutional delay and

⁶⁷ Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, 386-391.

⁶⁸ Cheema, *Indian Nuclear Deterrence: Its Evolution, Development and Implications for South Asian Security*, 274-278.

escalation suppression, deterrent signals and policy tempos become mutually unintelligible. Strategic misperception and escalation miscalculation thus emerge as inevitable products of structural asymmetry.

The India-Pakistan nuclear confrontation reveals that this temporal asymmetry exists not only at the level of deployment, but also in the pacing of risk perception and decision-making behavior. India tends to view nuclear weapons as a last-resort option and has developed multilayered crisis management and delayed-response mechanisms. But Pakistan intends to incorporate nuclear weapons into its conventional strategic framework, rendering them potentially usable options in deteriorating battlefield conditions. The temporal gap between the two states means that even when confronted with the same escalatory event, their perceptions of risk and escalation pacing are likely to be misaligned. For instance, following the 2019 Pulwama incident, India promptly launched the Balakot airstrikes as a signal of limited retaliation aimed at maintaining escalation boundaries. However, Pakistan interpreted the strikes as a severe escalation and responded with its own air sorties, pushing the crisis dangerously close to full-scale escalation.⁶⁹ In this context, nuclear deterrence seems not only fail to serve a stabilizing function, but accelerated conflict escalation.

⁶⁹ Najimdeen Bakare and Muhammad Zubair Iqbal, "Efficacy of Personality Traits, Religious Ideology and Political Capital of Event: The Case of Pulwama Attack," *Strategic Studies*, 40, no. 4, (2020): 22-23.

A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan Confrontation and Its Implication

83

Successive nuclear crises demonstrate how asynchronous nuclear development trajectories translate into risks of strategic miscalculation. When the Kargil War erupted in 1999, both states had already conducted nuclear tests, yet the crisis escalated rapidly into large-scale conventional conflict. Pakistan viewed its limited infiltration as a controllable engagement, whereas India interpreted it as a grave challenge to the existing Line of Control, prompting conventional retaliation and military mobilization that swiftly expanded the conflict.⁷⁰ Following the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, India undertook a ten-month-long military mobilization, while Pakistan entered nuclear alert status and issued multiple ambiguous signals. The result was an unpredictable escalation trajectory that undermined the stabilizing logic of deterrence.⁷¹ The 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2019 Pulwama incident further underscore the institutionalized pattern of tempo misalignment: India attempted limited retaliation, yet Pakistan's rapid strategic responses and ambiguous nuclear posture introduced an escalation potential that was difficult to contain. These cases all point to a persistent reality that, although nominally nuclear rivals, both sides have remained in a condition of institutional asynchrony, with no substantive alignment in

⁷⁰ Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Advanced Study of India, 2002), 4-6.

⁷¹ P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis of 2001-2002* (London: Routledge, 2003), 20-27.

escalation pacing or risk perception. As a result, nuclear deterrence becomes a structurally unstable illusion.

Institutional asymmetry not only amplifies the risk of escalation, but undermines the possibility of risk containment. Within the bilateral framework, India has committed to building an institutionalized command structure and crisis-delay mechanisms which require political consultation and risk assessment and result in a relatively prolonged decision-making cycle. In contrast, Pakistan's military-dominated system enables more immediate strategic responses and lacks the p institutional constraints necessary to ensure consistency and restraint. The consequence is a structural disconnect: one side prioritizes institutional stability and predictability, while the other operates through rapid escalation and strategic ambiguity. As a result, escalation responses between the two states cannot be synchronized or institutionally linked. When one side is still engaged in deliberation and risk evaluation, the other may have already entered the stage of tactical deployment and escalation. The nuclear standoff thus shifts from a relationship of mutual deterrence to a crisis cycle devoid of convergence and mutual trust.⁷² This imbalance in institutional tempo also diminishes the effectiveness of third-party intervention, as mediators often miss critical escalation points, rendering crisis momentum increasingly

⁷² Michael Krepon, *Crisis Stability in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2020), 15-19.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

85

difficult to restrain. Consequently, miscalculation and loss of control become structural constants within the confrontation system.

**VI. Conclusion: The India-Pakistan Experience and Its
Dialogue with Nuclear Deterrence Theory**

The Cold War context has established three core assumptions underlying nuclear deterrence theory: first, that actors must possess stable and unitary strategic intentions; second, the symmetrical capabilities for devastating retaliation will help to ensure mutual deterrence stability; and third, the institutionalized communication mechanisms effectively manage escalation risks. However, the empirical trajectory of the India-Pakistan confrontation seems repeatedly demonstrate that the above assumptions are historically contingent, applicable only primarily to the institutional environments of Western powers under specific external conditions. When transplanted into postcolonial contexts characterized by asymmetric institutional structures and the infiltration of ambiguous actors, these assumptions quickly face challenge. Rather than validating the nuclear peace thesis, the India-Pakistan case provides a compelling empirical refutation, revealing the limits of nuclear deterrence theory. It brings a paradigmatic shift to the existing theoretical framework and underscores the need for a revised model.

At the level of actor assumptions, the India-Pakistan conflict reveals dynamics that fall outside the scope of Western rationalist decision-making models. The long-term Kashmir sovereignty claim has become highly symbolic, transformed into an extension of national mythology, wherein the intractability of sovereignty assertions shapes a collective decision thinking that departs from strategic rationality. When sovereignty symbols are bound to state legitimacy and regime authority, nuclear weapons cease to function as instruments of cost-calculated restraint, and instead become signifiers of political will and national resolve. As result, the deterrence theory's foundational assumption—that actors act to maximize utility—is rendered inoperative. The India-Pakistan experience thus demonstrates that in conflicts of high symbolic intensity, the operational foundations of rational response mechanisms embedded in deterrence theory are fundamentally undermined.

In terms of power structure and actor boundaries, the institutional infiltration of non-state actors and proxy networks has rendered deterrence mechanisms devoid of identifiability and accountability. The proxy organizations operating within Pakistan—often controlled by its military and intelligence apparatus—are not external anomalies but structural components embedded within the state's strategic practice. When conflict behavior is decoupled from formal decision-making chains, the essential conditions for nuclear deterrence—clearly identifiable

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

87

adversaries and a coherent logic of escalation response—cease to exist. Under a framework of blurred responsibility and misaligned intent, deterrent signaling collapses into institutional dislocation, and nuclear weapons fail to perform their stabilizing function as thresholds of escalation. In other words, when the state actor is neither unitary nor transparent but instead highly ambiguous, nuclear deterrence will lose the basic institutional preconditions.

At the institutional level, the chronic absence of formalized crisis management mechanisms between India and Pakistan has left each episode of conflict escalation on a high-risk trajectory—devoid of dialogue, early warning, or restraint. The avoidance of full-scale war during the Cold-War nuclear standoff was made possible by series of institutional safeguards such as hotline systems, risk-reduction agreements, and third-party mediation. In contrast, the India-Pakistan case has repeatedly showed that, in the absence of such institutional frameworks, nuclear confrontations lead to unrestrained escalation and unclarified signaling. The consequence is not merely deterrence failure but the formation of a confrontation structure in which escalation becomes normalized. Institutional disjuncture is not a peripheral issue; it is foundational to the logic of nuclear stability. When institutional mechanisms are lacking and cannot ensure risk control or consistency in escalation expectations, the stability of nuclear deterrence loses its very foundation.

In terms of temporal structure and institutional maturity, the development trajectories and strategic planning of India and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities exhibit pronounced asynchrony. India has established a comprehensive nuclear system since 1974, but Pakistan owned its nuclear capability until 1998 and prioritized rapid escalation and low-threshold deterrence which aiming to catch up, while persistently lacking institutionalized command structures and policy transparency. This divergence in developmental pacing has produced mismatched risk perceptions and distorted signal interpretation, transforming nuclear confrontation from a condition of stable balance into a paradoxical structure—one in which escalation is increasingly predictable, yet its outcomes remain uncontrollable. Temporal asynchrony not only undermines the effectiveness of deterrence but also amplifies the risks of miscalculation and predictive failure, rendering it one of the most intractable sources of institutional vulnerability in nuclear security.

Even never break up a full-scale nuclear conflict till now—though existing some kind of tepid war, the India-Pakistan confrontation is no longer merely illustrative of operational challenges to deterrence mechanisms; it has offered a paradigmatic challenge to the traditional theoretical basis of nuclear deterrence. If deterrence theory continues to rely on Cold War-era structural assumptions without incorporating the realities of postcolonial contexts, limited global proliferation, asymmetric

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

89

strategic interaction, and ambiguous power actors, it will not only fail to explain but may also distort our understanding of nuclear stability in non-Western regions. In the sense, the India-Pakistan experience should be recognized as a critical impetus for reconstituting nuclear deterrence theory from a model premised on stability expectations to one that accounts for risk structures under conditions of institutional heterogeneity and behavioral ambiguity.

VII. Bibliography

Aggarwal, J. C., and S. P. Agrawal. *Modern History of Jammu and Kashmir*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, (1995).

Art, Robert J., and Kenneth N. Waltz. *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, (2009).

Bakare, Najimdeen, and Muhammad Zubair Iqbal. "Efficacy of Personality Traits, Religious Ideology and Political Capital of Event: The Case of Pulwama Attack." *Strategic Studies*, 40, no. 4, (2020): 22-23.

Basrur, Rajesh. *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, (2006).

Betts, Richard K. *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, (1987).

Bluth, Christoph. "India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Nuclear Deterrence." *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 22, no. 3, (2010): 387-406.

Brodie, Bernard. *Strategy in the Missile Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, (1959).

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

91

Brown, Seyom. "Purposes and Pitfalls of War by Proxy: A Systemic Analysis." *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 27, no. 2, (2016): 243-257.

Brubaker, Rogers. "Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, no. 1, (2009): 21-42.

Byman, Daniel. "Passive Sponsors of Terrorism." *Survival*, 47, no. 4, (2005): 117-144.

Chari, P. R., Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen. *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis of 2001-2002*. New York: Routledge, (2003).

Cheema, Zafar Iqbal. *Indian Nuclear Deterrence: Its Evolution, Development and Implications for South Asian Security*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, (2010).

Clary, Christopher, and Vipin Narang. "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities." *International Security*, 43, no. 3, (2019): 7-52.

Cohen, Stephen P. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, (2004).

Fair, C. Christine. *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, (2014).

Fair, C. Christine. *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba*. New York: Oxford University Press, (2019).

Freedman, Lawrence. *Deterrence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, (2004).

Freedman, Lawrence. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, (1981).

Ganguly, Sumit, and Kanti Bajpai. "Kashmir: A Strategic Crisis or Ethnic Nationalism?" In *Subnational Movements in South Asia*, edited by Subrata K. Mitra and R. Alison Lewis. New York: Routledge, (1996): 125-139.

Ganguly, Sumit, and S. Paul Kapur. *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, (2010).

Ganguly, Sumit. "Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency: Political Mobilization and Institutional Decay." *International Security*, 21, no. 2, (1996): 76-107.

Holloway, David. *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, (1983).

Hussain, Sharaq. "Nuclear Deterrence and the Prevention of War: The Case Study of India and Pakistan." *Journal of Peace and Diplomacy*, 1, no. 1, (2020): 47-56.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

93

-
- Jalil, Ghazala Yasmin. "Nuclear Year 2025 in Review." Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), (2026).
- Jervis, Robert. "Deterrence Theory Revisited." *World Politics*, 31, no. 2, (1979): 303-304.
- Jervis, Robert. *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (1984).
- Jervis, Robert. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (1989).
- Jones, Rodney W. *Minimum Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: An Overview*. Reston: Policy Architects International, (2001).
- Kapur, S. Paul, and Sumit Ganguly. "The Jihad Paradox: Pakistan and Islamist Militancy in South Asia." *International Security*, 37, no. 1, (2012): 111-141.
- Khan, Feroz H. *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, (2012).
- Khan, Zafar. "The Changing Contours of Minimum Deterrence in South Asia." *Policy Perspectives*, 13, no. 1, (2016): 77-96.
- Khan, Zafar. *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence*. London: Routledge, (2015).

Khan, Zulfqar. "The Changing Dynamics of India-Pakistan Deterrence." *Pakistan Horizon*, 66, no. 4, (2013): 1-19.

Krepon, Michael, and Julia Thompson. *Deterrence Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia*. Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, (2013).

Krepon, Michael, et al. *Crisis Prevention, Confidence-Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia*. Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, (1995).

Krepon, Michael. "The Stability-Instability Paradox in South Asia." In *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, eds. Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, (2006): 10-13.

Krepon, Michael. *Crisis Stability in South Asia*. Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, (2020).

Kristensen, Hans M., and Matt Korda. "Nuclear Notebook." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Accessed June 6, 2025. <https://thebulletin.org/nuclear-risk/nuclear-weapons/nuclear-notebook/>.

Ladwig, Walter III. "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine." *International Security*, 32, no. 3, (2007): 158-190.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

95

Levy, Adrian, and Cathy Scott-Clark. *The Siege: The Attack on the Taj*. London: Penguin, (2013).

Lyon, Rod, and Christine Leah. "Deterrence and Non-State Actors: Theory and Practice." *Security Challenges*, 5, no. 4, (2009): 49-60.

Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. *Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine*. August 17, 1999.
<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/70efe4/pdf/>.

Narang, Vipin. *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, (2014).

Perkovich, George. *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, (1999).

Powell, Robert. "Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense." *International Security*, 27, no. 4, (2003): 86-118.

Riedel, Bruce. *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Advanced Study of India, (2002).

- Sagan, Scott D. "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb." *International Security*, 21, no. 3, (1997): 54-86.
- Sagan, Scott D., and Kenneth N. Waltz. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*. New York: W. W. Norton, (2003).
- Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, (1966).
- Schelling, Thomas C. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (1960).
- Snyder, Glenn H. *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, (1961).
- Snyder, Glenn. "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror." In *The Balance of Power*, edited by Paul Seabury, 184-201. San Francisco: Chandler, (1965).
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). *SIPRI Yearbook 2025: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2025).
- Tannenwald, Nina. "The Vanishing Nuclear Taboo? How Disarmament Fell Apart." *Foreign Affairs*, 97, no. 6, (2018): 16-24.

**A Tepid War under Nuclear Deterrence: India-Pakistan
Confrontation and Its Implication**

97

-
- Tehsin, Muhammad. "Nuclear Doctrine and Deterrence Stability in South Asia." *Global Social Sciences Review*, 6, no. 6, (2019): 525-530.
- Tellis, Ashley J. *Pakistan's Nuclear Posture: Conflicts with India's Strategic Restraint*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2013).
- Tellis, Ashley J. *The Lessons of the 2001-2002 Crisis for Indian Military Planning*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2006).
- Waltz, Kenneth N. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*. London: IISS Adelphi Papers, (1981).
- Watterson, Christopher J. 2017. "Competing Interpretations of the Stability-Instability Paradox: The Case of the Kargil War." *The Nonproliferation Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2017.1366623>
- Yusuf, Moeed. *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, (2018).
- Zutshi, Chitralkha. "India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Issue: 1947 and Beyond." *Education about Asia*, 14, no. 2, (2009): 13.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban
Governance in a Globalized Context—A
Comparative Study of the London 2012 and Beijing
2008 Olympic Games**

Jen-Shin Yang*

Abstract

Hosting mega-events has long been regarded as a strategic tool for cities to establish a global presence, attract investment, and catalyze urban development. In an era of globalization, such events function not merely as arenas for sporting competition and cultural demonstration but as spaces where local and global forces intersect with local governance. Cities compete to stage these global events as a means to reposition themselves within transnational networks of resources, attention, and reputation. Yet, while the most conspicuous effect of hosting mega-events is the enhancement of global visibility, the more enduring consequence often lies in the acceleration of urban transformation—reshaping infrastructure, governance structures, and civic identity. Event-led urban transformation thus provides a compelling justification for shifting political agendas,

* Jen-Shin Yang is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Administration and Policy at National Taipei University (NTPU), Taiwan.
Email: jsyang@mail.ntpu.edu.tw | Orcid ID:
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9275-596X>

reorganizing institutional priorities, and reallocating urban resources.

This study investigates how local aspirations for event-led urban transformation affect the governance arrangements of host cities in a globalized context. It adopts the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games as comparative case studies. The two cities are similar in scale and ambition but differ significantly in socio-political systems, urban planning traditions, and governance cultures. Through this comparison, the study explores how global norms of event delivery—such as standardized organizational frameworks, branding logics, and legacy discourses—interact with local institutional particularities. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with event planners, government officials, and community actors, as well as questionnaire surveys with local residents, this study identifies the tension between localized particularities and globalized homogeneity.

The findings suggest that while globalized event models on the surface satisfy host cities' needs for enhancing global visibility and accelerating urban transformation, they simultaneously flatten local characteristics and shrink space for alternative imaginary of governance. In both London and Beijing, the pursuit of a "world-class" image led to the marginalization of certain communities and priorities, revealing how global competitiveness can erode social inclusivity. The analysis argues

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 101

that delivering mega-events in urban governance is not only a contestation between the globalized template and localized needs, but also a test stone for the host city's governability—the ability to leverage the opportunity and squeeze the most juice out of the mega-event.

By situating the delivery of mega-events within the context of globalization, this study highlights the need for critical reflection on who defines the urban agenda and who benefits from event-led transformations. Cities must clearly identify the give and take—who gives, and who takes—when welcoming mega-events to town, ensuring that the pursuit of global visibility does not eclipse the pursuit of local well-being.

Keywords: globalization, mega-event, Olympic Games, urban governance, urban regeneration

I. Introduction

In an era of globalization, hosting mega-events is attractive for cities to secure competitive advantages in inter-urban competition. Mega-events are inherent to 'dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance'¹, so the publicity effects for host cities are almost certain. Publicity is often required by cities at various scales. Take the Olympics as an example, global cities like London, Tokyo, and Paris do not need a boost from mega-events to raise global awareness, yet still bid for the hosting rights so that they can stay 'active and keep their profile up with other global cities'.²

Beyond publicity, the transformation of urban space is a strongly advocated post-event legacy. Mega-projects, such as building stadiums and improving infrastructure, are frequently initiated or accelerated by staging mega-events. Since a global event is coming to town, it is necessary to revamp the urban landscape to impress and accommodate global spectators; since there is a definite deadline to meet, resources must flow into the locality in a timely manner. Consequently, the social, economic, and physical transformation associated with mega-events can be

¹ M. Roche, *Mega-events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (Routledge, 2000).
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tJapCUz-9QcC>.

² Noam Shoval, "A New Phase in the Competition for the Olympic Gold: The London and New York Bids for the 2012 Games," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24, no. 5 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9906.00146>,

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 103

justifiably accelerated .

As a result, the hosting of mega-events has been a globalized practice since the 1980s, the time when the paradigm of urban governance has shifted from managerialism to entrepreneurialism.³ The multiple dimensions of governability can be effectively demonstrated in the delivery of mega-events. From bidding for the hosting right to the closing ceremony, it demands an urban governor to solicit public support, attract investment, mitigate political tensions, enhance visibility, and maneuver resources, etc. Governability is easily associated with the spectacle of mega-events and the event-led legacy. The legacy of urban transformation, more directly, is even more of a solid, visible proof of governability.

However, recent editions of the Olympic Games have raised questions about the distribution of claimed advantages. Furthermore, the inequitable allocation of event-led benefits may exacerbate social polarization rather than mitigate it ⁴. The construction of the Olympic aspirations could have a significant impact not only on the extent to which the claimed legacy could

³ David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The transformation in urban governance in late capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/490503>.

⁴ H. Zhang, "Study on the Economic and Social Impacts of Using Mega-events for Urban Regeneration," *Communications in Humanities Research* 23 (2023): 164, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/23/20230894>.

be realized but also on the priority in the city's agenda-setting and, more profoundly, on the direction the city would be led. Thus, this study poses the following question: *How does the construction of aspirations for an event-led urban transformation impact the urban governance of host cities?*

To answer the question, the event-led intangible and tangible urban transformations are adopted as the analytical approach; the former refers to social and economic transformations, and the latter to the transformation of the built environment. The London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympics serve as case studies. By dissecting the intangible and tangible urban transformations, the two cities' respective governing performance in terms of the realization of promised legacy and the distribution of costs and benefits can be summarized and evaluated.

In the following sections of the paper, the backgrounds of the two cases and the methods for data collection are first elaborated, followed by the results and discussion of the findings. By identifying the differences and similarities between the two cases, the paper concludes with a comprehensive appraisal of the impacts and implications of event-led urban transformation for urban governance.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 105

II. Case Background and Methodology

A. Case background

The London 2012 Olympics, including the Paralympic Games, took place from 27th July to 9th September 2012. A vital vision of the Games was to ‘benefit the community through regeneration’⁵, with Lea Valley, the poorest area in London⁶, serving as the focal point for both the event and the regeneration efforts. The Olympic area encompassed six East London boroughs—Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich, and Waltham Forest. To seize the opportunity to regenerate East London, the host boroughs formed a loose alliance known as the Host Boroughs Unit.

The London 2012 Olympics were seen as a catalyst for East London regeneration, but the decision to bid remained contentious until 2003. Amid economic austerity and with Wembley Stadium already under construction, the Culture Media and Sport Committee questioned the government's prudence. The committee also noted divided local opinions on hosting the Games in East London. Some borough officials saw the Games as essential for improving transport infrastructure, echoing Mayor Ken Livingstone's view that the Olympics would secure government funding for East End development. However, local community

⁵ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London 2004), 17.

⁶ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

groups opposed such a ‘concerted local authority stance’, arguing that the Lea Valley was ‘a tranquil and precious green lung’, not ‘derelict land needing restoration’⁷.

Despite the disputes, there was a strong feeling that London should participate in the bid for the 2012 Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) tends to choose host cities on different continents rotationally, and the 2012 Olympics were expected to be a European Games. In the oral evidence submitted on 14th and 15th January 2003, the then Secretary of State for DCMS, Tessa Jowell, expressed her view about why London should participate in the bid:

‘[It] is in East London that you get the synergy between the space required for Olympic development and the planned regeneration ... [Also] 2012 will be a European Games and after that the IOC will move to another continent.’⁸

That is, 2012 would be a ‘now-or-never’ opportunity for the UK to host the Olympics. A week after the Committee’s report was published, the Cabinet decided that the Government would back a London bid.

⁷ Culture Media and Sport Committee, A London Olympic Bid for 2012, HC268, 14 (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2003).

⁸ Culture Media and Sport Committee, Short A London Olympic Bid for 2012, 23.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 107

On 6th July 2005, the IOC awarded London the right to host the 2012 Olympics. London's success was primarily due to two key points. The first is the bid's emphasis on 'excellence without extravagance'⁹ and the commitment to use existing and temporary facilities wherever possible. London's Candidature File promised that new structures would 'fill significant gaps in London's sports infrastructure'¹⁰. According to the IOC's evaluation, only 55% (18 out of 33, Table 1) of the competition venues were either under construction or awaiting construction when London bid in 2005.

Table 1: Construction status of venues

Total sports venues to be used	Existing		Under construction or planned, irrespective of the Games	Games dependent	
	No work required	Work required		Under construction or planned (permanent)	Under construction or planned (temporary)
33	13	2	6	3	9

The other key point in London's Olympic bid was its strong connection to the East London regeneration project. The bid aligned with the Olympic movement's goal of combating social exclusion 'through participation in sport', emphasizing the development of sports infrastructure in marginalized areas (IOC-

⁹ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 19.

¹⁰ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 11.

Sport and Environment Commission 1999:26). Given concerns about the Olympic brand image being associated with extravagance and elitism, London's focus on social responsibility resonated with the IOC's intentions for host cities.

The Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics took place from 8th to 24th August 2008, and the Paralympic Games from 6th to 17th September. 'New Beijing, Great Olympics' was the motto of the Beijing 2008 Olympics stated in the Candidature File, which demonstrated Beijing's ambition to use the Games to 'speed up its modernization and integration into the international community'¹¹. It was not implicit that Beijing wanted to seize the Olympic brand to leverage the branding process for Beijing and China. From this perspective, compared to London's inward focus on East London regeneration and Britain's sports legacy, Beijing's bid presented a more extensive display of outward showcasing.

Winning the right to host the 2008 Olympics was crucial for China. After narrowly losing to Sydney in its bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games, Beijing was determined to succeed in its second attempt. The slogan 'One World, One Dream' elevated Beijing's bid to a highly symbolic level, closely tied to national pride. This connection between the bid and nationalism is evident in the overwhelming public support. Gallup and IOC's polls showed

¹¹ Committee Beijing Olympic Games Bidding, Beijing 2008 Candidature File, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Beijing 2000), 3

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 109

that 94.9% and 96.4% of citizens, respectively, supported Beijing's bid ¹², far outpacing its competitors.

Beijing strategically chose Wali Village (窪里鄉) in northern Beijing as the primary Olympic site to enhance its bid's chances. The area, initially reserved for stadium construction due to its proximity to the 1990 Asian Games athletes' village, briefly became a lucrative zone for developers and the urban elite, touted as 'the foreigners' zone' (新浪房产). However, rapid, poorly planned development led to its decline, turning it into a rural-urban fringe with decayed conditions and unsafe neighborhoods. By the early 2000s, the fact that the area had housed cheap accommodations and illegal immigrant workers made large-scale land appropriation easier since the clearance of such urban villages had been part of Beijing's redevelopment plan.¹³

While pragmatism prevailed, Beijing's Candidature File emphasized the full integration of the Olympic Games into its existing development plans. Unlike London's 'excellence without extravagance' approach, Beijing committed fully to funding the

¹² BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid* (Beijing: 北京體育大學出版社, 2010), 119.

¹³ Hyun Bang Shin, "Life in the shadow of mega-events: Beijing Summer Olympiad and its impact on housing," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 2, no. 2 (2009): 134.

Games¹⁴. The city promised ‘brand new and exciting venues’ in the then-mayor’s letter to the IOC¹⁵. The IOC’s evaluation report indicated that 59% (22 out of 37) of Beijing’s competition venues were under construction or awaiting construction when its bid was submitted in 2001¹⁶.

Compared to London’s Candidature File, which put a great weight on East London regeneration, Beijing was much more outward-focused. Table 2 compares the backgrounds of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympics.

¹⁴ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Beijing, 2000), 71.

¹⁵ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2.

¹⁶ I. O. C. Evaluation Commission, *Report of the Ioc Evaluation Commission for the Games of the Xxix Olympiad in 2008*, International Olympic Committee (Lausanne, 2001),

http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_299.pdf.)

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 111

Table 2: A comparison of the backgrounds of the cases

	London 2012 Olympics	Beijing 2008 Olympics
Main stage	Lower Lea Valley, East London	Wali Village, North Beijing
Area characters of the main stage	London's poorest and most disadvantaged area	Farmland and urban-rural fringe, which had been reserved for hosting the Olympics since the 1990s
Degree of public support	Some disputes between levels of government and the local community	Supported by over 90% of citizens
What inspires the bid?	• The 2012 Olympics would be a European one – a 'now-or-never' opportunity for the UK • The synergy of the Games and East London regeneration	• Losing the first Olympic bid to Sydney in 1993 resulted in a firm resolution for the second bid • Accelerating Beijing's modernization and integration into the international community
% of venues waiting to be built	55%, 18 out of the total 33	59%, 22 out of the total 37
How was the Olympic legacy portrayed?	Benefiting the local community of East London	Integral to the modernization of Beijing

B. Methodology

This study compares two cities with different social conditions and political regimes but similar scales to examine the impact of the Olympic Games. The appreciation of the similarities and differences between cases traverses the study. Comparing

cities of similar scale ensures a balanced basis for comparing their respective resource allocation and aspired legacies, while their differing contexts help assess whether globalizing forces, such as the Olympics, flatten local particularities. Therefore, how the same Olympic process has been paved by two completely diverse cities and whether the disparities lead to similar or different interpretations can be analyzed and revealed.

Theoretically, such a comparison also enriches theory by transcending parochialism, fostering cross-context discussions, and enabling a cross-national evaluation of the Olympics. If a comparative study is potentially able to destabilize the matter-of-fact but problematic democracy/autocracy, capitalist/socialist, developed/underdeveloped, and Western/non-Western dichotomies, this study may contribute to this mission through the selection of two cases as dichotomized as possible in terms of the above criteria.

As to data collection, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were conducted in both London and Beijing.¹⁷ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants who worked in Games-led regeneration/development, ranging from central and local civil servants to people in academia,

¹⁷ London interviews were conducted from mid-April 2013 to January 2014. questionnaire survey from mid-August to September 2013. Beijing interviews were conducted from mid-March to June 2014. questionnaire survey from May to June 2014.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 113

LOCOG/BOCOG,¹⁸ and NGOs. In London and Beijing, six and five interviews were conducted respectively.

In London, interviews included individuals involved in organizing planning applications for the Games (LON-01), drafting East London regeneration frameworks (LON-02), coordinating post-Games legacy from the central government (LON-03), managing local regeneration progress (LON-04), a social activist questioning the necessity for London to host the Games (LON-05), and a specialist in stakeholder relations at London Legacy Development Corporation (LON-06). In Beijing, interviews focused on those ensuring construction compliance (BEI-01), planning and managing Olympic venues (BEI-02), as well as experts in Chinese urban regeneration (BEI-03, BEI-04), and a former village cadre who handled communication during Games-led land expropriation (BEI-05).

While semi-structured interviews explore insiders' perceptions, the *qualitative questionnaire survey* effectively gauged the attitudes of ordinary people most affected by the Olympics' delivery and legacy. Qualitative surveys, unlike quantitative ones, focus on understanding the diversification

¹⁸ LOCOG stands for the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and BOCOG for Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games.

within a population¹⁹. Both qualitative questionnaires and interviews aim for data saturation, achieved through comprehensive information gathering.

In London, a questionnaire survey was conducted at public venues to gather opinions from local residents. Respondents were exclusively local residents, so their views would not be diluted by those of others. Each survey of respondents in London took five to 15 minutes, depending on how much information they were willing to share. During the street survey, I asked respondents each question, identified the response option that was closest to their answer, and then confirmed with the respondent whether this was the option that best described their opinion. Respondents were encouraged and prompted to elaborate and clarify their views. Respondents' answers were recorded, and their additional opinions were noted on each questionnaire. 126 valid samples were collected through the street survey in London.

Conducting the questionnaire survey in Beijing differed significantly from the London experience. Attempts to replicate a street survey failed due to potential respondents' cautious attitudes towards strangers. In fact, when it came to the difficulties of conducting street survey, several Beijing

¹⁹ Harrie Jansen, "The logic of qualitative survey research and its position in the field of social research methods" (paper presented at the Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2010).

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 115

interviewees opinionated that considering the land expropriation of Beijing's Olympic site, as mentioned above, started in the 1990s for the preparation of the Asian Games, randomly asking people on the street, even in the Olympic neighborhood, could not be considered a good means to access the residents affected by the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Beijing fieldwork was conducted in 2014, 6 years after the Beijing Olympics, but more than 20 years after the beginning of land appropriation. Within the two decades, the composition of the residents had changed to a certain extent, and chances are they had already moved and scattered. As a result, replicating a street survey in Beijing like that in London is neither feasible in practice nor desirable in methodology.

Fortunately, I was later introduced to a property management company that employed former residents of Beijing's Olympic site.²⁰ These employees, responsible for maintaining the Olympic Park's infrastructure, were more approachable and provided a viable alternative for conducting the survey. The property management company employees were ideal respondents for my study, as they had lived in the area for some time and were directly affected by the Olympics. Concerning the respective

²⁰ Before the Chinese government acquired the land in Wali Village for the Olympics, the area was primarily for farming, with residents working in agriculture-related occupations. The acquisition left many residents homeless and jobless. To address this problem, the government established a property management company and offered employment contracts to the displaced residents, who were then employed as security guards, cleaners, or gardeners in the Beijing Olympic Park.

scenario of the two cases, the replication of data collection methods in Beijing might not be an ideal option. Designating the property management company as the site for a questionnaire survey, on the contrary, might well help to obtain useful and meaningful data. I therefore distributed questionnaires in late March 2014 to the employees with the help of acquaintances. While circumstances did not permit a face-to-face survey, it, on the other hand, ensured anonymity and the authenticity of responses without concerning identity disclosure. Eventually, I received 39 completed questionnaires, with two respondents providing their contact details for further discussion. The responses were diverse rather than uniformly positive, indicating the effectiveness of data collection.

Adopting a qualitative approach, this study triangulated data from interviews, questionnaire surveys, and secondary sources, including Olympic candidature files, policy papers, and proceedings of selective committees. These data were compiled, disassembled, and reassembled through a systematic coding process, that is, initial coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis. Firstly, initial coding was conducted by segmenting the data and assigning descriptive codes. This was followed by axial coding, which allowed a higher level of abstraction by identifying relationships among codes and reorganizing them into several 'axes'. Lastly, these axes functioned to inform thematic analysis, in which the following themes emerged:

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 117

- Level of engagement with the Olympic Games
- Costs and benefits of hosting the Olympic Games
- Promised legacies of the Olympic Games
- Land expropriation and displacement
- Social transformation after hosting the Games (such as feeling safe and friendly)
- Improvement of the built environment

These themes served as the framework for generating interpretations and drawing inferences for the study.

III. Results and Discussion

A. The intangible: Social and economic transformation

(A) London - Achieving Convergence

Convergence, closing the socio-economic gap between East London and the rest of the city within 20 years²¹, is the fundamental rationale for London to host the Olympics. Putting resources for the marginalized and the disadvantaged also echoed the social responsibility that the IOC intended to impose on the Olympic host cities. As a result, the bidding team of London pointedly accentuated the regeneration projects and the positive

²¹ Unit Growth Borough, "London's Growth Boroughs," accessed 27 December, 2014, <http://www.growthboroughs.com>.

legacies for the local neighborhood in the Candidature File. The Olympics were framed as a catalyst for East London regeneration, aiming to create ‘a legacy for the community’ and stimulate ‘vital economic regeneration’ in areas of multiple deprivation²². It is therefore not surprising that whether convergence was achieved has been scrutinized.

However, one interviewee warned that this could be an illusion. ‘Convergence will automatically happen in terms of numbers’ through the gentrification process led by “new people moving in” (LON-02). Another interviewee from the Growth Boroughs Unit acknowledged gentrification as ‘inevitable’ and not necessarily negative, emphasizing the need to ensure that existing deprived residents benefit from the opportunities created by economic growth (LON-04).

Against this background, the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) was designed as ‘a response from the host boroughs and their partners’ to deliver ‘the promise of [the Olympic] legacy benefits for communities’²³. As a political document, the SRF aims ‘to stir the politicians into some sense of responsibility’ for the regeneration of the host boroughs (LON-02). In other words, keeping the Olympic regeneration

²² BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

²³ Boroughs The Host, *Strategic Regeneration Framework- An Olympic legacy for the host boroughs*, 10 (Hackney Design & Print, 2009).

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 119

legacy at a high political profile gave birth to SRF. The SRF's Action Plan of 2011-2015 further grouped the measures taken to achieve convergence into three broad themes²⁴: creating wealth, reducing poverty, supporting healthier lifestyles, and developing successful neighborhoods. The subsequent paragraphs are organized around three broad themes to examine the social and economic transformation driven by London's Games.

1. Creating wealth and reducing poverty

This is the theme that reveals a mixed picture. Figure 1 shows that the gap in 'economically active people in employment' between the host boroughs and London in general, the key measure of the theme, shrank from 2009 to 2012 but then widened in 2013²⁵. The theme's indicators associated with pupils or teenagers also present a relatively promising outlook. Nevertheless, other indicators of the theme look paler, such as the unemployment rate, median earnings for full-time workers, and the working-age population qualified to at least Level 4^{26,27}.

²⁴ Boroughs The Host, "Convergence framework and action plan 2011- 2015," (2011).

²⁵ Boroughs The Host, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," (2013): 44; Boroughs The Host, Boroughs "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," (2014): 52.

²⁶ Boroughs The Host, Equivalent to the 1st year of a bachelor's degree.

²⁷ Boroughs The Host, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 44; Boroughs The Host, "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," 52.

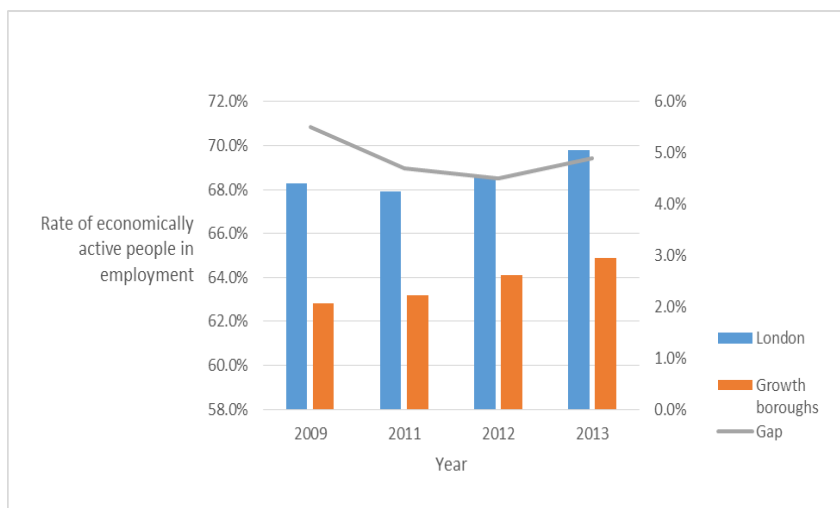


Figure 1: People in employment

Source: The Host Boroughs (2013, 44; 2014,52)

2. Supporting healthier lifestyles

The theme of life expectancy shows a positive trend from 2009 to 2012, but reveals mixed results across individual indicators. Key indicators such as obesity levels in Year 6 school children, recommended adult activity levels and inactivity rates are less promising,²⁸ contradicting the goal of fostering grassroots sports and a lifelong sporting habit.²⁹ Despite a notable

²⁸ The Host Borough, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 45; The Host, "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," 53.

²⁹ HM Government and Mayor of London, *Inspired by 2012: The legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games*, 21 (London: Cabinet Office, 2013).

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 121

increase in weekly sporting activity nationally from 2005 to 2013, disparities in obesity levels among school children between the host boroughs and the rest of London persisted or worsened.

3. Developing successful neighborhoods

The final theme examines crime reduction, which showed a slight decrease of 0.4 points in violent crime levels per 1,000 population.³⁰ My street survey in the host boroughs reflected similar findings, with 14.3% of respondents noting improved neighborhood safety post-Olympics, while others observed no significant change. Among those who felt safer, some reported increased comfort with walking the streets or going out at night, which they had previously avoided.

Regarding social and economic transformation, reducing poverty emerged as the most persistent issue. The widening unemployment gap underscored the imperativeness of substantial changes to boost prosperity³¹. Echoing the examination results, an interviewee emphasized the need to equip residents with skills to benefit from local job opportunities as a vital element of the Games-led regeneration (LON-06).

³⁰ The Host Borough, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 46; The Host, "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," 54.

³¹ The Host Borough, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 18.

(B) Beijing - Speeding up Modernization

Unlike the London 2012 Olympics, which prioritized East London regeneration, Beijing's Olympic vision did not focus on renewing dilapidated neighborhoods or addressing social deprivation. Instead, Beijing's slogan, 'New Beijing, Great Olympics'³², reflected its ambition to join the 'world city roster'³³. The Games were seen to accelerate modernization and international integration, emphasizing 'Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics, and People's Olympics'³⁴. These concepts highlighted Beijing's goals for environmental sustainability, technological advancement, and cultural development. The following discussion explores these dimensions and assesses Beijing's progress in modernization in the delivery of the Games.

1. Green Olympics – environmental dimension

The Green Olympics, committed to providing a clean environment and improving Beijing's air quality, was a central promise of the event. Beijing vowed to provide a 'nice and clean environment' for the athletes and spectators and ensured that the Games would operate in an eco-friendly manner.³⁵ The change in

³² BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 3.

³³ Li Zhang and Simon Xiaobin Zhao, "City branding and the Olympic effect: A case study of Beijing," *Cities* 26, no. 5 (2009): 251..

³⁴ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 3.

³⁵ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 53.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games**

123

air quality in the 2000s is presented in Figure 2, which reveals an upward tendency in general, notably increasing in the year before the Olympic Games were staged and then reaching a plateau from 2009 to 2011. The apparent improvement in air quality only occurred at the peak time of the Games preparation: two years before the Games.

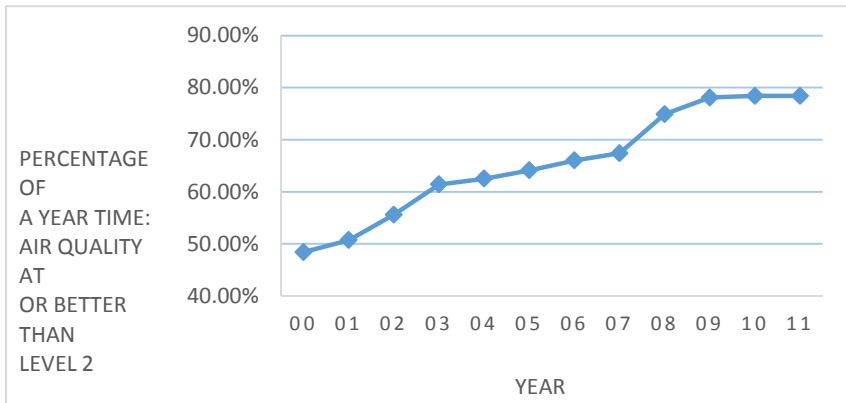


Figure 2: Air quality at or above level 2 in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

The air quality in Beijing remains a huge health concern for its citizens. Adding insult to injury, a 2015 documentary by Chinese journalist Chai Jing, titled *Under the Dome*, further provoked uproar for exposing the severity of air pollution in Chinese cities. The documentary aroused public suspicion of the issue because it documented ‘how little leverage they have with

public and private industry to enforce anti-pollution laws' and how environmental regulations have been 'steamrolled in China's industrial expansion'³⁶.

2. High-tech Olympics – economic and industrial dimensions

Hosting cities hope that the Olympic Games will provide an economic stimulus, and Beijing likewise had expectations of the 'Olympic economic boom'.³⁷ Figure 3 presents Beijing's regional GDP and annual rate increase from 2000. The undulating line in the graph presents a general upward trend pattern for the annual rate between 2000 and 2004, reaching a peak of 14.5% in 2007 and then experiencing a significant drop of 5.4% in 2008; afterwards, the yearly increase rate fell between 7.3% and 9.1%. An Olympic economic boom indeed occurred during the preparation years, but the effects faded away almost immediately after the closing ceremony.

³⁶ Ben Beaumont-Thomas, "Smash-hit Chinese pollution doc Under the Dome taken offline by government," updated 10 March 2015, 2015, accessed 3 May, 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/09/chinese-pollution-documentary-under-the-dome-taken-offline-government>.

³⁷ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 300.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games**

125

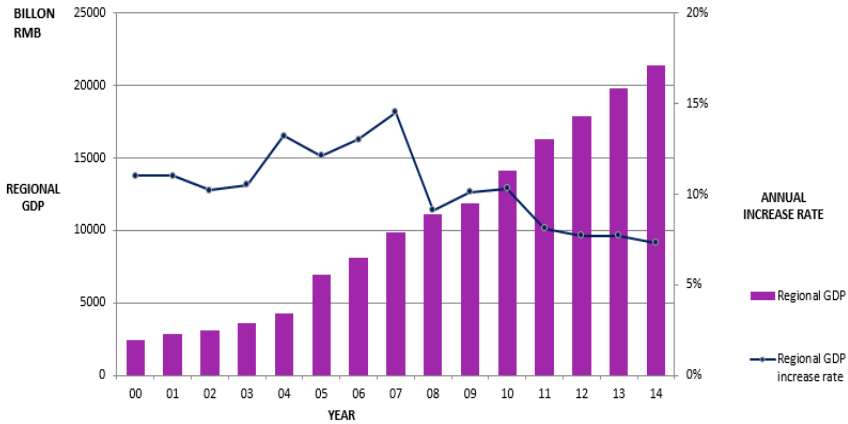


Figure 3: Regional GDP and annual growth rate in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

Beijing hoped for more than an overall economic boost but focused on the domains that particularly contributed to its modernization trajectory. Two of the industries focused on were ‘the telecommunications and information technology industries’, which had enjoyed ‘rapid growth’ and were expected to ‘be further enhanced by hosting the Games’.³⁸ Figure 4 illustrates the incremental expenditure growth in Beijing’s research and development.

³⁸ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 5.

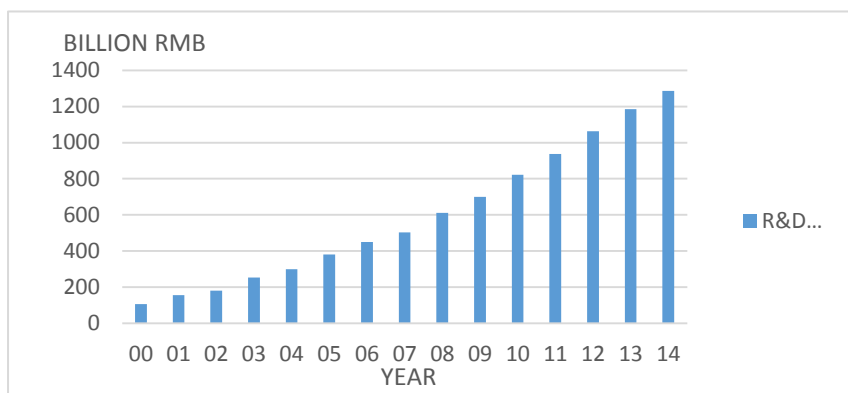


Figure 4: Research and development expenditure in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

3. People's Olympics – civil dimension

In the People's Olympics dimension, Beijing portrayed itself as 'home for a time-honored oriental civilization'. It emphasized the Chinese philosophy of harmony in promoting cultural exchanges³⁹. The Beijing Olympics claimed to successfully promote the culture of volunteering and make the city more welcoming for citizens and visitors. The spirit of volunteering was designated as the spiritual legacy of the Beijing Olympics⁴⁰. As of 2012, a database of the Beijing Volunteer Foundation listed 1.53

³⁹ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 23.

⁴⁰ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 268.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 127

million registered volunteers.⁴¹

Another ambition for Beijing was to elevate China from a ‘sports country’ to a ‘sports power’⁴² by hosting the Olympics. As Figure 5 shows, compared to 2000, data from 2005 indicate an increase in weekly exercise habits among urban citizens in Beijing and a decrease among their rural counterparts, highlighting a notable divergence in exercise patterns. Despite this, by 2012, the proportion of Beijing citizens engaging in weekly exercise had reached 82.9%⁴³. This increase in mass sports participation is attributed to the Olympics and was seen by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as crucial to Beijing’s modernization and cultural development.

⁴¹ 北京商报, "以志愿者精神诠释北京精神 (Interpreting the spirits of Beijing with the spirits of volunteering)," 2012, accessed 10 May, 2015, <http://www.beijing2008.cn/city/voluntaryservice/volunteersaction/20120718/3718.shtml>.

⁴² BODA Beijing, "Study on the Promotion of Mass Fitness and Recreation in Beijing and the Improvements in the Level of Service for Public Sports," 2011, accessed 10 May, 2015, http://www.beijing2008.cn/Hot_Event/activities_2010/bjculture/olympicspeech/ltwj/yjbg/20120729/3745.shtml.

⁴³ BODA Beijing, "Study on the Promotion of Mass Fitness and Recreation in Beijing and the Improvements in the Level of Service for Public Sports."

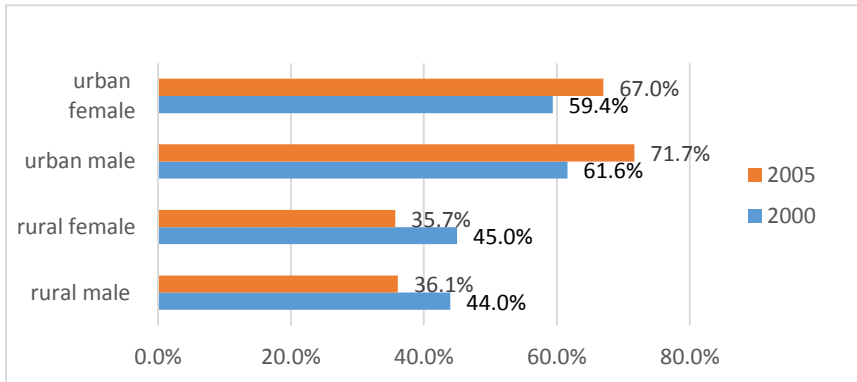


Figure 5: Citizens engaging in a weekly exercise habit in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Sports

B. The tangible: Built environment transformation

The transformation of the built environment is a crucial aspect of urban regeneration. Such tangible improvements serve to address community needs and provide visible achievements for politicians. Host cities often use the Olympics to catalyze and enhance physical regeneration and development. This section is dedicated to examining the regeneration in London and development in Beijing, highlighting a similar discourse of justification despite the cities' contrasting contexts.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 129

(A) *London - Games-Led Regeneration*

As one of the five themes⁴⁴ of the London 2012 Olympic legacy, the regeneration of East London was always at the center of public attention and dispute. London's Candidature File described the Olympic Games as a:

major catalyst for change and regeneration in East London, especially the Lea Valley, leveraging resources, spurring timely completion of already programmed infrastructure investment and leaving a legacy to be valued by future generation.⁴⁵

The language used and the message transmitted here epitomize how hosting mega-events has been justified in the past three decades by event promoters. Whether the justification withstands testing, nevertheless, demands closer inspection.

1. Change for the better, change for whom?

As shown in the following figure, my street survey in East London revealed that 34.1% of respondents believed transportation infrastructure had improved since London won the Olympic bid, and 53.2% noted an increase in recreational amenities.

⁴⁴ The five themes of the legacies of the London 2012 Olympics were sports and healthy living, regeneration of East London, economic growth, bringing communities together, and the legacy of the Paralympics (Government and Mayor of London 2013)

⁴⁵ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

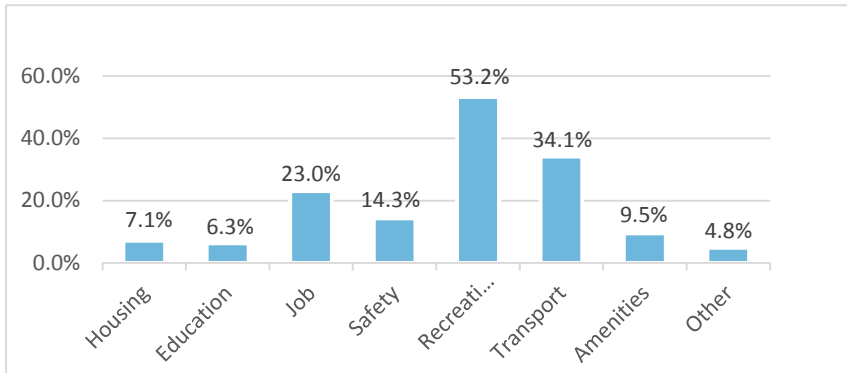


Figure 6: Dimensions that have changed for the better after London won the bid

The Government and some local authorities in the host boroughs insisted that staging the Games in the Lea Valley had been necessary for improving the area's transportation infrastructure. When considering the transport improvement brought about by the Games, an interviewee indicated the synergy between staging the Games and the progressive transportation changes; 'the improvement of public transport [in Stratford] was not appreciated before the Olympics, but it is now' (LON-01).

Regarding recreational amenities, survey respondents noted improvements, including increased facilities and enhanced attractiveness. However, this raises the question of who benefits: better transportation links serve locals and visitors, while recreational amenities reflect a decision on who the target clients

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 131

are. Many respondents cited Westfield Stratford City⁴⁶ as a major improvement, but it was perceived as catering more to outsiders than locals, with minimal positive spill-over effects on surrounding businesses. Some respondents felt Westfield, described as an ‘island’, might have harmed local small businesses by creating competition and not fostering broader economic activity.

2. The cost efficiency of hosting the Games

That the host borough's area has needed redevelopment can hardly be denied. These environmental, economic, and social predicaments create a hotbed for widespread deprivation, which leaves the locals with a difficult life and a bleak outlook. An interviewee viewed the disadvantageous position of people in East London as ‘morally not right’ while the other side of London enjoyed the fruits of economic success (LON-02).

Despite that, the Culture Media and Sport Committee report highlighted divergent local opinions on staging the Olympics in the East End, with debates focused on the scale and methods of regeneration.⁴⁷ While tackling deprivation is broadly supported, opinions vary on the appropriateness of the Olympic scale for redevelopment. An interviewee put a question mark on ‘the scale

⁴⁶ A shopping center opened in 2011. It is also part of London's regeneration project, Stratford City, which aimed to transform the ‘fridge mountain’, the home of discarded white goods, into a multi-functional urban hub through staging the London 2012 Olympic Games.

⁴⁷ Culture Media and Sport Committee, Short A London Olympic Bid for 2012, 5.

of the Olympic process'; a smaller scale of redevelopment may better serve the area (LON-05). The street survey also revealed that 48.4% considered the Olympics an effective regeneration tool for East London, though only 31.7% saw it as the best approach (Figure 7). Many respondents viewed the Olympics as an effective but costly means of regeneration, questioning whether more direct and cost-effective alternatives might have been preferable.

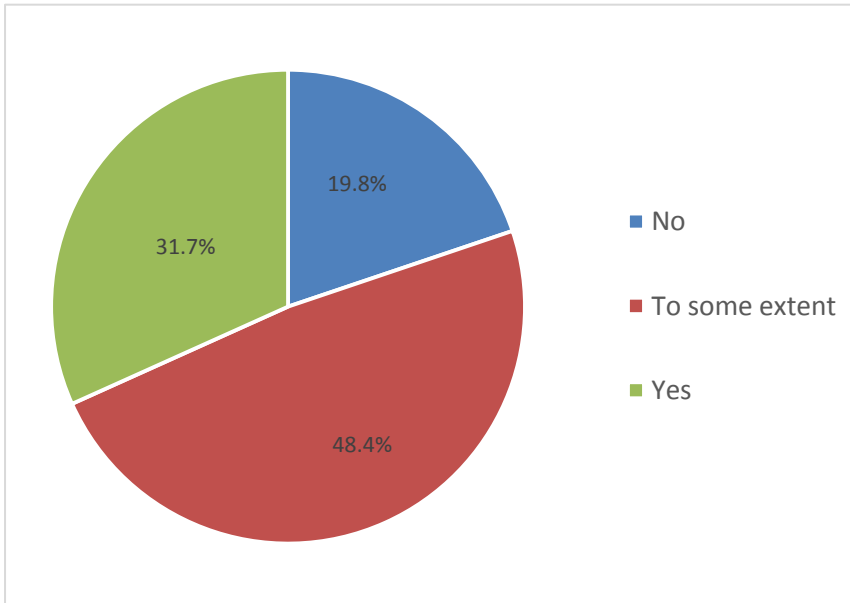


Figure 7: Whether staging the Games was the best way for East London regeneration

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 133

(B) Beijing - Games-Led Development

Securing the 2008 Summer Olympics was crucial for China; as one interviewee noted, ‘We had tasted failure once before and could not afford to lose again’ (BEI-02). Physical development was, hence, not a primary goal; Beijing's need to win the bid outweighed it. Furthermore, China's construction boom predated the Olympic bid, with significant development occurring across primary and secondary cities in China . Nonetheless, the Olympics allowed Beijing to focus municipal and national resources on enhancing its development capacity⁴⁸.

1. Modernization and beautification

Hosting the Olympics marked a significant leap forward in Beijing's urban infrastructure as the city sought to join ‘the lineup of world cities’⁴⁹. The necessity of ‘high-end facilities’ for Beijing was argued by one interviewee. According to him, ‘it is necessary to newly build them and make them permanent’ (BEI-01). From 2001 to 2007, Beijing's road network expanded from 2,500 km to 4,500 km, and six new subway lines were added,

⁴⁸ Hyun Bang Shin, "Looking back and ahead: Lessons from the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games," 2012, accessed 28 November, 2013, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/looking-back-2008-beijing-olympic-games-shin/>.

⁴⁹ Neil Brenner and Roger Keil, *The global cities reader* (Psychology Press, 2006), 277.

increasing the total to eight by 2008⁵⁰. All five interviewees noted significant improvements in the city's infrastructure following the Olympics.

In addition to infrastructure improvement, Beijing undertook extensive beautification efforts to present its best face to the world. Traditional, spacious courtyard living for one family had evolved into slums crammed with four or five households, which was the target of the Chinese government's 'substantial slum-clearance program'⁵¹. The evacuation of residents peaked during Olympic preparations, with an estimated 165,000 people affected annually by demolitions or relocations, double the rate from 1991 to 1999⁵². Beijing's 'paradoxical status as a market economy led by an authoritarian state'⁵³ facilitated the rapid execution of standard operation procedures of land acquisition for delivering mega-events, namely a pipeline of demolition, eviction, compensation and relocation.

The CCP faced the risk of social unrest due to its aggressive

⁵⁰ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 186.

⁵¹ Nicolai Ouroussoff, "Lost in the New Beijing: the old neighborhood," *New York Times*, 2008, accessed 16 August, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/arts/design/27ouro.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁵² Deanna Fowler, *One World, Whose Dream?: Housing Rights Violations and the Beijing Olympic Games* (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), 2008).

⁵³ Anne Broudehoux, "Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2007): 389.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 135

actions, leading Hu Jintao, upon his 2004 inauguration, to implement ‘a series of measures to address mounting tensions and appease social discontent’⁵⁴. Maintaining stability was crucial for the CCP, particularly during the Olympics. These measures seemingly mitigated tensions, with many affected residents viewing their inconvenience and displacement as ‘a worthy sacrifice’⁵⁵. The former chief village cadre of the current national stadium site recalled his communications with villagers in this context.

At first, residents were hesitant, not because of opposition to the Olympics, but because they were emotionally attached to the land. However, after some negotiation, they supported the event without excessive demands. Many now feel proud that the Olympic Park was once their home. They feel a deep connection to such a significant event and are eager to share that story with others. (BEI-05)

As the chief cadre responsible for negotiations between villagers, the demolition company, and the municipal government, his views may be biased. Another interviewee offered a more practical perspective, suggesting that local residents dealt with land expropriation by calculating their potential gains:

⁵⁴ Broudehoux, "Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis," 389.

⁵⁵ Broudehoux, "Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis," 389.

People weighed the pros and cons of resisting versus cooperating with the government. When competing against the Chinese Communist Party, as seen in the Olympics, the chances of winning were slim. But if they were dealing with private developers, how long they could hold out as a "nail house" often determined how much compensation they could eventually get. (BEI-03)

2. Demolition, conservation, and more demolition

The rapid pace of mass demolition leading up to the Beijing Olympics not only fueled social discontent but also sparked conflict between the CCP, cultural conservationists, and international media. As shown in Figure 8, hutongs disappeared at an unprecedented rate during the two decades from the 1990s, when major construction projects began, to the 2000s, when Beijing was preparing for the Games.

Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a Globalized Context—A Comparative Study of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games 137

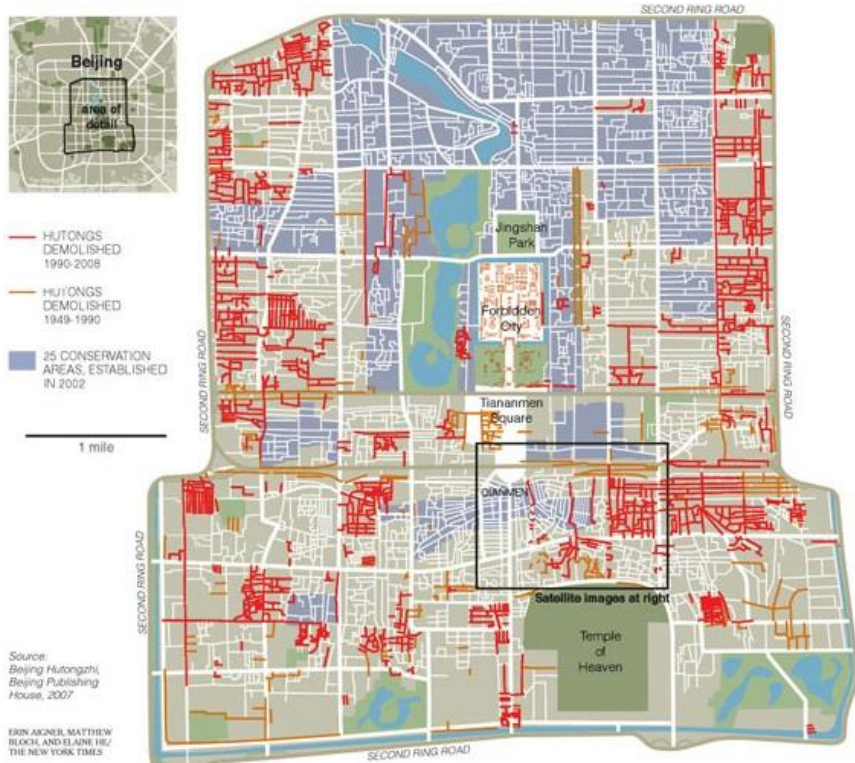


Figure 8: Map of demolished hutongs

Source: Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2008. "Lost in the New Beijing: the old neighborhood." New York Times. Accessed 16 August 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/>

With pressure from conservationists, both domestically and internationally, and to maintain an immaculate image for the Beijing 2008 Olympics, the CCP had no alternative but to slow down the pace of demolition. In 2004, 15 historic conservation

districts were newly listed⁵⁶ to limit their reconstruction only when the original design was retained; demolition and expansion were forbidden unless the structures were illegal⁵⁷. While this shift to cultural conservation appeared more neighborhood-friendly, it was argued that such efforts often facilitated the revalorization of historic quarters, leading to an incongruous mix of restored buildings and modern establishments catering to tourists. What is worse, designating conservation areas paradoxically accelerated demolition elsewhere, as the redevelopment of non-listed areas was deemed justifiable.⁵⁸

IV. Conclusion

This section is divided into two parts: a comparison highlighting their differences and similarities, as well as a concluding appraisal of the impact of event-led urban transformation on urban governance.

⁵⁶ The list is the Conservation Planning of 25 Historic Areas in Beijing Old City, initially announced in 1990.

⁵⁷ Deanna Fowler, *One World, Whose Dream?: Housing Rights Violations and the Beijing Olympic Games*, 22.

⁵⁸ Hyun Bang Shin, "Urban conservation and revalorisation of dilapidated historic quarters: The case of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing," *Cities* 27, Supplement 1, no. 0 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.03.006>, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275110000600>; Yue Zhang, "Steering Towards Growth: Symbolic Urban Preservation in Beijing, 1990-2005," *The Town Planning Review* 79, no. 2/3 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.2307/40112754>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40112754>.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games**

139

A. Comparison: Differences and similarities

To facilitate the comparison, the following table summarizes the findings of the two cases.

Table 3: Games-led intangible and tangible transformations

Category	London 2012 Olympics	Beijing 2008 Olympics
What is the primary legacy to achieve?	Convergence of East and other areas of London	Modernization of Beijing to catch international standards
What function does the Games provide?	Catalyzing and synergizing East London regeneration	Beautifying Beijing's urban landscapes and upgrading infrastructure
Evaluation of <u>social and economic transformation</u> ?	• Creating wealth and reducing poverty • Supporting healthier lifestyles • Developing successful neighborhoods	• Green Olympics • High-tech Olympics • People's Olympics
Evaluation of <u>built environment transformation</u>	• Skepticism about who benefits • Skepticism about whether regeneration through the Games is the optimal approach	• The beautification of the urban landscape • The cycle between demolition and conservation

The London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games began with diverse aspirations: London aimed to converge the gap between its host boroughs and the rest of the city through regeneration, while Beijing sought to modernize and showcase

China. Despite contextual differences reflecting their social and political conditions, the broader patterns in both cases reveal similarities. Based on the comparison between the two cases, the differences and similarities can be derived.

Difference A. Convergence as opposed to modernization

The regeneration of East London was a central aspect of the London 2012 Olympics, serving as the primary rationale for domestic political support. The Olympics were framed as essential for converging the gap between the host boroughs and the rest of London, making their regeneration seem unattainable without the Games. London's successful bid was closely linked to this emphasis on social and community benefits, aligning with the Olympic brand's focus on humanity and its values.

In contrast, Beijing's primary aim was not urban regeneration but modernization. While the Olympics did accelerate improvements, Beijing focused on enhancing infrastructure and sports venues rather than merely boosting resources. The drive for modernization was rooted in aligning Beijing with global standards of what a modern city should be, rather than addressing immediate material needs.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 141

Difference B. Prudence as opposed to extravagance

During the London 2012 Games, scrutiny focused on cost-effectiveness amid austerity, with concerns about the stadium's environmental impact and its temporary nature. The emphasis was on ensuring that benefits would be distributed to the local community through a post-Games legacy. However, despite East London's regeneration being the primary justification for hosting the Games, the scale of the Games may have exactly diluted the goal of local improvements. As multiple interviewees and questionnaire respondents mentioned, smaller-scale regeneration efforts might have been more effective if the east regeneration were genuinely the purpose for hosting the Games, not the other way around. Taking such kind of cost-effectiveness considerations into account, economic prudence was, therefore, a key theme in London's approach.

In contrast, Beijing's delivery was characterized by grandeur and extravagance, exemplified by the £64 million spent on the opening ceremony compared to London's £27 million⁵⁹. The focus was on showcasing China's global reputation with a lavish and meticulously executed event, reflecting China's intent to present a 'real China' to the world. In addition to the budget scale, this desire was also epitomized by accentuating meticulousness

⁵⁹ Jonathan Grix, "Sport Politics and the Olympics," *Political Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2013): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-9302.12001>.

and precision in the delivery of the Games. Therefore, cost-effectiveness considerations were basically off the table.

Similarity A. Olympic Games: an exogenous but befitting essentiality

The necessity of hosting the Olympics to achieve host cities' regeneration and development goals is similarly elaborated in both cases. Official documents, such as the Candidature Files, describe the Games as integrating seamlessly into existing municipal plans, either accelerating regeneration (London) or upgrading and expanding urban development (Beijing).

Two key assumptions underpin this narrative. First, despite criticisms that mega-events disrupt local life and the social and political texture of the host city⁶⁰, both London and Beijing portrayed the Olympics as enhancing rather than disrupting urban governance. The Games were depicted as complementing and integrating with existing plans rather than causing fundamental shifts in resource allocation or agenda setting. Second, while both cities had pre-existing plans for regeneration or development, and while the Games were not a disruptive intrusion for host cities' urban plans, the Games were portrayed as a necessary condition

⁶⁰ Solmon J. Greene, "Staged cities: mega-events, slum clearance, and global capital," *Yal Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 6 (2003).; John Horne, "The Four 'Knowns' of Sports Mega - Events," *Leisure Studies* 26, no. 1 (2007/01/01), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360500504628>.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 143

for achieving the desired scale and impact. London's Candidature File argued that without the Games, East London regeneration would be slower and less ambitious.⁶¹ Similarly, Beijing's Candidature File and subsequent reports emphasized that the Games accelerated Beijing's modernization drive, aligning with its ongoing development efforts.⁶² In a nutshell, the Games were portrayed as exogenous yet befitting, accelerating but not redirecting urban development. However, this framing generated an ironic outcome: it legitimized extraordinary governance interventions as instruments of national and urban advancement, while downplaying how the Games reshaped decision-making processes, reset temporal priorities, and redefined the relationship between the state and urban space.

Similarity B. A mixed picture in legacy realization

Despite their contrasting social and political contexts, both London 2012 and Beijing 2008 present mixed legacies. Official narratives highlight the significant benefits of hosting the Games, but local skepticism persists. In London, while the host boroughs have seen regeneration, questions persist about whether the Olympics were the most effective approach and whether gentrification could genuinely benefit locals. The promise of convergence is thus questionable. In Beijing, measurable

⁶¹ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

⁶² BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2; BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*.

improvements were evident during the Games but were short-lived, lasting only until the event's closure. The extensive demolition and displacement involved in Beijing's modernization process undermine the long-term value of these changes.

Both cities claimed that the Olympics aimed to benefit their populations. Still, evaluations through interviews and surveys reveal a gap between the official statistics and the lived experiences of local residents. State-led narratives of success coexisted with localized experiences of displacement, exclusion, and uneven benefit.

B. Concluding remarks: The dual nature of mega-events narrative and urban governance

Mega-events bring about a grand scale of visitor attractiveness and awareness, media reach and lucrativeness, public budget and private investment, and urban transformation and development.⁶³ A city's visibility, competitiveness, and symbolic status are closely crystallized in an event of weeks. Hosting a mega-event such as the Olympic Games is therefore utilized as a strategic instrument for cities competing in a globalized world. Anticipated economic, social, and

⁶³ Martin Müller, "What makes an event a mega-event? Definitions and sizes," *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 6 (2015/11/02), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.993333>.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 145

infrastructural legacies of decades are commonly invoked to justify the substantial resources involved and the urban agenda rearranged. Yet, as this study has shown, globalization's promise of uniform benefits is misleading: while the Olympics are marketed as a universal catalyst for renewal, empirical evidence suggests that the 'regeneration punch' frequently fails to materialize and may, in certain contexts, even contribute to forms of 'deep urban decomposition'.⁶⁴ While upgraded infrastructure and renewed urban spaces can constitute tangible post-event legacies, the rapid transformation demanded by global mega-event standards tends to prioritize spectacular, high-profile investments at the expense of more routine but socially significant policy areas. As a result, hosting a mega-event like the Olympics may well generate multiple forms of value, but those benefits are unevenly distributed across social groups.

By examining the Olympic legacies of London 2012 and Beijing 2008, this study has analyzed how global narratives of Games-led transformation shape urban governance within distinct socio-political contexts. Despite their divergent institutional arrangements, political traditions, and constructed Olympic aspirations, both cities framed the Olympics in remarkably similar terms before staging—an essential yet seamless extension that complemented existing urban strategies rather than fundamentally disrupting them. This convergence reflects the relations between

⁶⁴ Ed Hammond, "A Marathon, Not a Sprint," *Financial Times* (London) 2011.

the influence of globalized governance templates and the legitimacy conferred. Magnified development, exceptional measures, compressed decision-making processes, and redefined priorities are rendered politically intelligible and broadly acceptable.

The findings illuminate a space for a comprehensive appraisal of governance performance, which can be perceived through two dimensions. The first is the realization of promised legacies, a dimension that examines whether the economic, social, and infrastructural legacies articulated before the Games were materialized and sustained. Secondly, the distribution of costs and benefits brings attention to who gained from these transformations and who bore the costs. The costs involve the burdens of land expropriation, inhabitant displacement, social disruption, and resource diversion. Taking these two dimensions together, the implications for governance can be revealed. The focus has thus shifted from whether the Games produced substantial urban transformation to whether these changes benefit the public and the cities as a whole. Empirical findings of the study suggest that both London and Beijing were left with mixed legacies, at times clouded by controversy. Official evaluations emphasized measurable achievements and symbolic success, yet interviews and survey findings revealed persistent gaps between these assessments and the lived experiences of local residents. These discrepancies problematize claims that the Games were

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 147

primarily hosted for the people, participated in by the people, and utilized to improve the lives of the people.

Rather than offering a normative critique of such political rhetoric, this study has sought to expose its dual nature. Globally legitimized discourses of development enabled host cities to pursue accelerated urban transformation, but they also masked the differentiated costs borne by various social groups. Recognizing this duality does not imply that cities should abandon competition to host mega-events. Instead, it underscores the importance of clearly identifying, across different policy domains, both the beneficiaries of event-led transformation and those adversely affected by it. Only through such clarity can stakeholders more fully assess the trade-offs of staging global spectacles and engage in more informed discussions about the long-term value for the cities.

● Bibliography

Beaumont-Thomas, Ben. "Smash-Hit Chinese Pollution Doc under the Dome Taken Offline by Government." Updated 10 March 2015, 2015, accessed 3 May, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/09/chinese-pollution-documentary-under-the-dome-taken-offline-government>

Beijing, Boda. "Study on the Promotion of Mass Fitness and Recreation in Beijing and the Improvements in the Level of Service for Public Sports." 2011, accessed 10 May, 2015, http://www.beijing2008.cn/Hot_Event/activities_2010/bjculture/olympicspeech/ltwj/yjbg/20120729/3745.shtml.

Beijing Olympic Games Bidding, Committee. *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*. 3 vols. Vol. 1, Beijing, 2000.

BOA. *London 2012 Candidature File*. 3 vols. Vol. 1, London 2004.

BOBICO. *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*. 3 vols. Vol. 2, Beijing, 2000.

BOCOG. *Bid Document and Analysis: Passion Behind the Bid*. (Beijing: 北京體育大學出版社, 2010).

Boroughs, The Host. "Convergence Framework and Action Plan 2011- 2015." (2011).

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 149

Brenner, Neil, and Roger Keil. *The Global Cities Reader*. Psychology Press, 2006.

Broudehoux, Anne. "Spectacular Beijing: The Conspicuous Construction of an Olympic Metropolis." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2007): 383–99.

China Economic Review. "Looking to the Provinces." 1993, accessed 21 May, 2014, <http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com/node/22961>.

Commission, I. O. C. Evaluation. *Report of the Ioc Evaluation Commission for the Games of the Xxix Olympiad in 2008*. International Olympic Committee (Lausanne: 2001). http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_299.pdf.

Culture Media and Sport Committee. *A London Olympic Bid for 2012*. London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2003.

Fowler, Deanna. *One World, Whose Dream?: Housing Rights Violations and the Beijing Olympic Games*. Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), 2008.

Government, HM, and Mayor of London. *Inspired by 2012: The Legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games*. London: Cabinet Office, 2013.

- Greene, Solomon J. "Staged Cities: Mega-Events, Slum Clearance, and Global Capital." *Yal Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 6 (2003): 161–87.
- Grix, Jonathan. "Sport Politics and the Olympics." *Political Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2013): 15–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-9302.12001>.
- Growth Borough, Unit. "London's Growth Boroughs." accessed 27 December, 2014, <http://www.growthboroughs.com>.
- Hammond, Ed. "A Marathon, Not a Sprint." *Financial Times* (London), 2011.
- Harvey, David. "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism." *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/490503>.
- Horne, John. "The Four 'Knowns' of Sports Mega-Events." *Leisure Studies* 26, no. 1 (2007/01/01 2007): 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360500504628>.
- Jansen, Harrie. "The Logic of Qualitative Survey Research and Its Position in the Field of Social Research Methods." Paper presented at the Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2010.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 151

McFarlane, Colin. "The Comparative City: Knowledge, Learning, Urbanism." 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00917.x. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 4 (2010): 725–42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00917.x>.

Müller, Martin. "What Makes an Event a Mega-Event? Definitions and Sizes." *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 6 (2015/11/02 2015): 627–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.993333>.

Ouroussoff, Nicolai. "Lost in the New Beijing: The Old Neighborhood." *New York Times*, 2008, accessed 16 August, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/arts/design/27ouro.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Robinson, Jennifer. "Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture." 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00982.x. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00982.x>.

———. *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. Questioning Cities Series. London: Routledge, 2006.

Roche, M. *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture*. Routledge, 2000. <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tJapCUz-9QcC>.

Shin, Hyun Bang. "Life in the Shadow of Mega-Events: Beijing Summer Olympiad and Its Impact on Housing." *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 2, no. 2 (2009): 122–41.

———. "Looking Back and Ahead: Lessons from the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games." 2012, accessed 28 November, 2013,
<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/looking-back-2008-beijing-olympic-games-shin/>.

———. "Urban Conservation and Revalorisation of Dilapidated Historic Quarters: The Case of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing." *Cities* 27, Supplement 1, no. 0 (6// 2010): S43–S54.
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.03.006>.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275110000600>.

Shoval, Noam. "A New Phase in the Competition for the Olympic Gold: The London and New York Bids for the 2012 Games." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24, no. 5 (2002): 583–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9906.00146>.

The Host, Boroughs. "Convergence Annual Report 2012- 2013." (2013).

———. "Convergence Annual Report 2013- 2014." (2014).

———. *Strategic Regeneration Framework- an Olympic Legacy for the Host Boroughs*: Hackney Design & Print, 2009.

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban Governance in a
Globalized Context—A Comparative Study
of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** 153

Zhang, H. "Study on the Economic and Social Impacts of Using Mega-Events for Urban Regeneration." *Communications in Humanities Research* 23 (2023): 163–69. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/23/20230894>.

Zhang, Li, and Simon Xiaobin Zhao. "City Branding and the Olympic Effect: A Case Study of Beijing." *Cities* 26, no. 5 (2009): 245–54.

Zhang, Yue. "Steering Towards Growth: Symbolic Urban Preservation in Beijing, 1990-2005." *The Town Planning Review* 79, no. 2/3 (2008): 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40112754>.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40112754>.

北京商报. "以志愿者精神诠释北京精神 (Interpreting the Spirits of Beijing with the Spirits of Volunteering)." 2012, accessed 10 May, 2015, <http://www.beijing2008.cn/city/voluntaryservice/volunteersaction/20120718/3318.shtml>.

Information for Contributors

Editorial Policy

The Editorial Board welcomes submissions of scholarly articles. Manuscripts accepted by the Editor are assigned to at least two anonymous referees for evaluation. The Editorial Board then examines the referees' reports and makes the final decision on publication. Submissions should be original contributions, not previously published or under simultaneous consideration by any other journal.

Format of Manuscripts

- The entire manuscript should be typed in Times New Roman (size 12). Submissions should preferably range from 7,000 to 12,000 words, including text, all tables and figures, footnotes, and bibliography.
- All figures and tables should be provided in camera-ready form. Notes should be placed at the bottom of the page in the form of footnotes. Parenthetical notation is not accepted. Complete bibliographic information must be provided. Authors are responsible for ensuring that their manuscripts conform to the "Tamkang Journal of International Affairs Style Guide."
- The manuscript must include a 300-500 word abstract outlining the focus and content of the article and five keywords. The title page should contain the title of the article, the author's name and current institutional affiliation, as well as a biographical statement of no more than 150 words inclusive of a valid e-mail address.

Style

Authors are responsible for ensuring that the format of manuscripts conforms to *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs Style Guide*.

Enquiries

All enquiries regarding submission to *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* can be made by writing an e-mail to tkutjia@mail2.tku.edu.tw.



**TAMKANG JOURNAL OF
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**