



CHINESE VIEWS OF EFFECTIVE CONTROL: THEORY AND ACTION



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Abbreviations

AMS	Academy of Military Science
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CFISS	China Foundation for International and Security Studies
CMC	Central Military Commission
CMS	Chinese Marine Surveillance
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FLEC	Fisheries Law Enforcement Command
LAC	Line of Actual Control
NDU	National Defense University
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SMS	Science of Military Strategy
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USNS	United States Naval Ship

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KEY FINDINGS

CHINESE STRATEGIC THINKING INCREASINGLY FOCUSES ON CRISIS AND CONFLICT CONTROL

Chinese strategic thinking since the 1990s has shifted increasingly to a focus on controlling situations during peacetime, crisis, and war. The concept of effective control introduced in the 2013 edition of the AMS's Science of Military Strategy is one of the latest and most comprehensive theories of situation control in PLA strategic thought, covering principles for "establishing posture," crisis prevention and control, and war situation control. As China's military, economic, and technological capabilities increase, its range of military and non-military means to shape situations in its favor will continue to grow.

EMPHASIS ON "SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES" DURING CRISES IS POTENTIALLY ESCALATORY

While authoritative PLA documents that discuss escalation control have many similar ideas to Western thinkers, they place emphasis on "seizing opportunities" during crises in ways that can be dangerously escalatory. Strategic texts call for China to look for ways to take advantage of crises to advance its interests, which is potentially at odds with the mandate to prevent or contain escalation. Furthermore, China's insistence on thorough war preparation during peacetime can also be provocative rather than deterrent.

MODERN CHINESE THINKING ON WAR CONTROL IS MORE CAUTIOUS THAN IT WAS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Despite the continuity of China's active defense strategy since the early days of the CCP, modern Chinese thinking on war control has become more cautious than it was in the 20th century. The increased complexity and destructive potential of modern "informationized" warfare and the new risks it poses to China's expanded global interests have made effective control of war more important. PLA war control theorists therefore stress that China should avoid war whenever possible, be assured of victory before entering a war, and minimize both cost and duration of the war when war is unavoidable. On the other hand, Chinese strategic writers seem optimistic about China's ability to control many aspects of "informationized local wars" through information technology and careful planning.

EFFECTIVE CONTROL THEORY IS INCOMPLETE AND CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

While effective control theory shows continuity with active defense strategy as well as past writings on crisis management and war control, it is still being developed and modified. PLA strategists and affiliated scholars are attempting to enrich China's doctrine on effective control by drawing on lessons from China's experiences, foreign wars, and the changing international situation. Underdeveloped areas include inadequate linkage between theory and operational behavior and insufficient consideration for accidental or unintentional escalation.

Introduction

Effectively deterring China or, in the case of a conflict, successfully bringing the conflict to a close will require deep understanding of China’s approach to and priorities in conflict. A term with evolving significance for these issues is “effective control” [有效控制], a concept most prominently discussed in the 2013 edition of the PLA’s Academy of Military Science’s (AMS) Science of Military Strategy (SMS). The authors of the text argued that effective control should be regarded as an important part of “active defense in the new era.” This means that in addition to winning wars, emphasis should be placed on containing war, managing peace, and deterring enemies.

Effective control is composed of the three core concepts of “establishing posture” during peacetime (using generally non-violent means to shore up China’s strategic weaknesses relative to adversaries, maintain stability on China’s periphery, and curb Taiwanese “separatism”); preventing and controlling crises (with the dual goals of preventing escalation into war while also “seizing opportunities” to advance Chinese interests); and controlling war situations when war does erupt (seeking to win as quickly as possible, at minimal cost, while containing escalation in intensity, scope, and other dimensions). Effective control also stresses thorough preparation and “seizing the initiative” to ensure victory in any conflict. The concept is highly relevant to understanding China’s strategic and operational behavior in most conflict scenarios as well as during peacetime, and helps to elucidate why the PLA may take actions that appear to be escalatory.

Table 1: Effective Control - Core Concepts

<p>Effective Control [有效控制]</p>	<p><i>Establishing Posture</i> [营造态势]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonviolent means during peacetime • “Strategic balancing” • Strengthen relations with periphery • Curb Taiwanese “separatism” <p><i>Crisis Prevention and Control</i> [防空危机]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent escalation into war • Seize opportunities <p><i>War Situation Control</i> [控制战局]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully plan victory in advance • Seize the initiative to control the conflict • Achieve rapid victory at minimal cost • Contain escalation in intensity, scope, goals, means, and other dimensions • Plan how to end the war
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The term “effective control” itself has not been widely studied in Western scholarship of PLA strategic thought, largely because it is a relatively recent innovation that does not appear in a wide range of authoritative sources. Perhaps the most thorough examination of the subject to date can be found in Taylor Fravel’s examination of the differences between the 2001 and 2013 editions of the AMS’s Science of Military Strategy, which appears

as a chapter in the 2016 book *The Evolution of China's Military Strategy*. Effective control is a new theoretical concept in the 2013 edition which did not feature in previous versions of the SMS.¹

There has been more Western literature on PLA thought on escalation control or “war control,” both of which are closely related though not entirely synonymous with “effective control.” A 2006 study by former Defense Intelligence Officer for East Asia Lonnie Henley found that war control was a relatively new topic in formal PLA scholarship and that it was focused on how to prevent unwanted conflict escalation while ensuring that PLA operations serve China's political goals.² In 2008, the RAND Corporation published a lengthy study of escalation management in the 21st century which included a chapter on Chinese thinking on that subject. Like Henley, the RAND report's authors noted that PLA thinking on escalation control at the time was in its relative infancy and highly theoretical, offering little insight on how the doctrine might manifest in actual military operations. The authors identified the related concepts of war control [控制战争] and war containment [遏制战争] as core goals of the PLA, requiring the use of both military and many non-military means to control many dimensions of war (scope, means, intensity, tempo, etc.) to prevent escalation and achieve political aims.³

In the past five years, there have been three significant Western studies of Chinese theories of escalation control. The first was a 2016 report by Alison Kaufman and Daniel Hartnett of the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), which examined a collection of authoritative PLA writings on escalation control and the spectrum of conflict from recent years (particularly since 2008). It found that the PLA continued to prioritize conflict control, with an increasing focus on crisis management; but that remaining gaps and ambiguities in the theory created risks of inadvertent escalation.⁴ Second, Alastair Iain Johnston of Harvard University wrote an article in 2016 on China's evolving theory of interstate crisis management, one of the core components of escalation control. Johnston noted that the PLA's thinking on crisis management has been heavily influenced by Western scholarship, including through collaboration with Western think tanks, but that China was continually working to develop more original conflict management concepts. Like the CNA authors, Johnston pointed out many potential problems and inconsistencies in Chinese crisis management theory and practice that might hamper the effectiveness of its conflict control efforts.⁵ Finally, in 2017, Burgess Laird published a report with the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) on Chinese writings on war control which came to many of the same conclusions as previous studies: that authoritative PLA writings on war control and escalation management were increasing but still failed to resolve significant tensions and flaws in the theory that had been noted over a decade ago.⁶

The following study distinguishes itself from past scholarship by specifically focusing on the concept of effective control as described in the 2013 edition of the AMS *Science of Military Strategy*. Because the range of authoritative sources on this concept is so narrow, the study draws from other PLA writings on related subjects such as crisis management and war control to further flesh out key parts of the effective control theory, but still centers effective control in its evaluation of China's behavior in the security realm. The study also offers a more up-to-date examination of PLA theory and practice of escalation control by including more recent sources such as the 2020 edition of the NDU's *Science of Military Strategy* and 2020 articles in official publications, as well as recent events such as the 2020-2021 Sino-Indian border conflict, which were not featured in earlier Western studies. In order to better understand how effective control and related strategic concepts may translate into military operations, the study attempts to link the theoretical concepts to guidance in authoritative operational texts.

The goal of the study is to examine China’s understanding of effective control and related concepts and to provide a succinct snapshot into how these ideas fit into China’s strategic thought and broader strategic system [战略体系]. It will examine authoritative PLA sources, with a particular focus on various editions of the Science of Military Strategy, to explain the PLA’s strategic guidance for “establishing posture,” crisis prevention and control, and war situation control – the three components of the effective control concept. The SMS guiding materials will be supplemented by writings of PLA scholars and other influential academics. The case studies in Section 2 draw on various Western and Chinese media and academic sources including studies from the Chinese perspective.

Section 1: Theory of Effective Control and Related Concepts

“Effective control” [有效控制] is a theoretical concept that refers to the PLA’s strategy of preventing or controlling conflict escalation while pursuing China’s strategic interests. The concept is featured prominently in the 2013 edition of the Science of Military Strategy [战略学] (SMS), a book on military doctrine put out by the PLA’s Academy of Military Science (AMS). This volume appears to be the first open-source Chinese military document (among very few) that references a strategic concept by the name “effective control.” While technically not an official statement of policy, the SMS is highly authoritative: it is the collaborative work of several dozen AMS military experts (led by Major General Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], the former director of the AMS’s War Theory and Strategic Research Department) and serves as a teaching material for PLA training and education. Furthermore, effective control as described in the SMS closely relates to Chinese theoretical concepts that are much more widely discussed in PLA sources, such as war control and active defense. For these reasons, understanding the effective control concept can offer considerable insight into Chinese thinking on escalation management, even if the term itself has not seen broader use.

Because the SMS 2013 is the main available authoritative source that describes the effective control concept, it will be used as the foundational text for the first half of this study. However, three other editions of the SMS are also relevant. The previous edition of the AMS’s Science of Military Strategy, released in 2001, contains a chapter on “war control” that can be seen as a precursor to the effective control concept and describes many similar and overlapping ideas. The other version of the SMS that explicitly references “effective control” by that name is a separate book by the same title published in 2017 by the PLA National Defense University (NDU). The most recent revision of the NDU’s SMS was published in 2020 under the direction of Lieutenant General Xiao Tianliang [肖天亮], vice president of the NDU.ⁱ While this book does not mention the term “effective control,” its sections on crisis control and war control are highly relevant and authoritative, and it is also the most recent of the three educational texts.

This study will also examine relevant theoretical writings by Chinese experts and PLA officers in notable academic journals and official publications such as PLA Daily. While less authoritative than official policy documents and PLA teaching materials, these works offer insight into China’s high-level discourse about escalation control and fill in details that are not covered in more general texts such as the Science of Military Strategy.

Active Defense

“Effective control” is introduced in the SMS 2013 as part of active defense [积极防御] strategy,ⁱⁱ which has been the CCP’s core military strategy since before the PRC was founded. Active defense can be seen as an over

i Hereafter, “SMS 2001” and “SMS 2013” will be understood to refer to the AMS’s versions of the SMS, while “SMS 2017” and “SMS 2020” will mean the NDU’s editions.

ii The SMS 2013 introduces effective control in a chapter called “Enrich and Develop Active Defense Strategic Thinking.”

arching set of principles that guide all of the PRC's strategic thought including effective control, though it is broad enough that its interpretation has varied and shifted significantly over time. Besides being subordinate to active defense in the strategic system, effective control is also in some ways a new derivative of that older strategy, sharing with it some key principles that will be described here.

The SMS 2013 outlines several basic tenets of active defense. First, the fundamental goal of active defense is to defend China's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. Second, active defense is considered a posture of self-defense rather than aggression, but it is an "offensive defense:" a defense-oriented strategy carried out through offensive tactics, "fully taking the initiative," and even preemptive strikes during campaigns and combat. This emphasis on acting defensively (even when carrying out offensive operations) can be seen for example in the way conflicts have been framed in official media and histories: China's participation in the Korean War is referred to as the "War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid (North) Korea [抗美援朝战争]. The 1962 border conflict with India (the Sino-Indian War) is regularly called the "China-India Border Self-Defensive Counterattack" [中印边界自卫反击战]. A months-long invasion of northern Vietnam in 1979 (the Sino-Vietnamese War) is officially called the "Self-Defense Counterattack Against Vietnam" [对越自卫反击战]. A skirmish with Vietnam in 1988 over Johnson Reef [赤瓜礁] in the South China Sea was framed in similar terms.

Third, active defense requires vigorous war preparations during peacetime to prepare for the most difficult possible military conflicts, based on the reasoning that it is "preferable to be prepared and not fight, but...definitely impossible to fight if you are not prepared." Fourth, active defense requires strategists not only to consider how to win wars, but also how to avoid or control them. Finally, active defense holds that wars are won by people, and that therefore China must maintain the ability to mobilize "the masses" to aid in the war effort, coordinate combat by the PLA with combat not done by the military, and coordinate military efforts with "various political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural battle lines."⁷

The tenets of active defense can be seen in many of China's recent actions in the security domain, including maritime militia confrontations, military-civil fusion, building of military facilities in disputed areas, small-scale border conflicts, and others. Many of its principles – seizing the initiative (offensive defense), thorough preparation for war, avoidance or control of war, and coordination of military and non-military efforts – are also key principles of effective control, as will be seen in this study.

Effective Control in the SMS

According to the SMS 2013, effective control is a broad concept which relates to the control of actual and potential crisis situations in order to prevent conflict and war while protecting Chinese interests. Effective control consists of three basic tasks: constructing a durable strategic posture that is favorable for China's internal stability and expanding interests; crisis prevention and control; and war control.ⁱⁱⁱ

In justifying the introduction of effective control into PLA strategy, the authors of the 2013 SMS cite several

iii This section and several subsequent sections overlap significantly with previous work by Taylor Fravel. Both this and Fravel's work summarize the same content from the same primary source, the 2013 Science of Military Strategy. For further information, see Fravel's chapter, "China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy: The Science of Military Strategy from 2001 and 2013" in *The Evolution of China's Military Strategy* by Joe McReynolds (2016).

weaknesses and vulnerabilities in China's capabilities. They state that although China's development has brought a significant increase in overall national power and military strength, China is "still limited in strategic capabilities, especially for military activities outside its borders," and its ability to endure prolonged warfare has decreased. They also note that China's growing international influence can "become the focal point for international disputes and struggles." Therefore, the authors argue that China cannot be passive or purely reactive; it must work to actively shape the security environment internationally and on its periphery, create "controllable, flexible, and gradual" means of resolving security pressure, expand China's national interests, turn global changes into opportunities for China's rise, embody a "soft tactics" [柔武] spirit in its military activities, and avoid entering into protracted conflicts.

The nature of warfare has also changed, according to the authors: war has become more fast-paced, expanded across multiple mutually influencing domains, and become more high-tech. Although the wars China anticipates facing are controllable, limited-objective local wars, the requirements to control such wars have become more complex and challenging.

In light of the aforementioned tasks and considerations, the authors argue in favor of integrating effective control deeply into Chinese military strategy, using it as a guide for operational, military deterrence, and non-war military activities both within China's borders and outside them. They describe three key changes in China's strategic approach: shifting the emphasis from "defense" [防] to "control" [控], from "war" [战] to "posture" [势], and from "seeking victory" [战胜] to "winning first" [先胜].⁸

One of the main theoretical innovations of effective control appears to be the integration of three broad PLA objectives into a single overarching concept. These three components are: establishing posture [营造态势];^{iv} crisis prevention and control [防控危机]; and war situation control [控制战局]. Chinese thinking on each of these concepts will be explored in the following subsections, with reference to various versions of the SMS, other authoritative documents, and works by prominent Chinese researchers.

Establishing Posture

Within the SMS 2013, "establishing posture" means building a strategic environment that favors China's "internal stability, external expansion, and long-lasting peace," through coordination of military forces with political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and other non-military means. The authors write that the task of "establishing posture" corresponds to the "hegemonic power's" (i.e. the United States) strategic containment and control, which China seeks to counteract within its neighborhood. At its core, "establishing posture" requires "strategic balancing" to increase the cost of enemy actions against China, building friendly partnerships with neighboring countries which may include providing economic and security assistance, and striving for re-unification with Taiwan.

Because of China's relative disadvantages compared to the "hegemonic power," the SMS advises against "dancing to the rhythm of [the adversary's] provocation" and instead to take the initiative [以我为主]. China should employ "strategic balancing:" make use of China's advantages to supplement its weaknesses, prevent political, economic, and diplomatic disputes from escalating into strategic conflicts, impede military expansion

^{iv} This term is difficult to translate precisely. Other possible translations include "Creating situations" or "creating momentum."

and military alliances against China, and avoid loss of control over crisis escalation. China should also vigorously contest military dominance of limited regions and increase the risks and costs of enemy deterrence actions or military intervention.

Building friendly relationships along China's periphery is considered an important contributor to stability. The SMS 2013 calls for China to promote "joint development" with its neighbors and build a relationship "as close as lips and teeth" with those nations. This may include providing security protection to neighboring countries or intervening to handle crises that may break out there. The authors of the SMS consider it within China's interests to reduce wars and conflict on China's periphery even when China is not directly involved, because the chaos may spill over into China.

Finally, the SMS 2013 calls for China to persist in "attacking with the pen and preparing the sword" [文攻武备] to prevent the Taiwan independence movement from gaining too much momentum. This means using non-military means to strengthen cross-Strait relations while reserving the right to use military force if necessary.⁹

Crisis Prevention and Control

Crisis prevention and control is the second major component of effective control. The primary goal of this task is to contain and control crises while still advancing China's interests. The 2013 SMS notes that while war has become less frequent, "crises" have become more frequent and pose a potential risk to China's security and development if allowed to escalate.

The SMS describes a crisis as a dangerous state "between peace and war" that has the potential to ignite a war. The authors say that the occurrence of crises presents both strategic risks and strategic opportunities for China. On one hand, crises that are not appropriately handled "may create serious disruptions and damage to the nation's development and overall security situation, and even affect the nation's rise." This concern necessitates the containment and control of crises to prevent them from escalating into wars. Means of crisis prevention and control include preventive defensive measures such as early warning systems, longer-term diplomacy to address the underlying roots of conflict, military deterrence, and non-war military activities.^v

On the other hand, the 2013 SMS says China should seek out ways to transform crises into opportunities to advance its interests when possible. It says that the aim of crisis management is not just stability for stability's sake, but rather to "vigorously forge ahead strategically," particularly to implement measures that may be difficult to push during peacetime. China should not stir up trouble where none exists, but neither should it be afraid to seize opportunities when crises do emerge. The book gives the example of Mao Zedong using the suppression of the 1959 rebellion in Tibet to implement reforms originally set for 1963, thereby eradicating Tibet's serf system.¹⁰

There is a potential tension between the goals of using crises to China's advantage and preventing escalation: overzealous pursuit of Chinese interests at the expense of other parties can cause conflicts to escalate. The 2013 SMS does not directly address this tension.

^v See the CASI Spectrum of Conflict report for more on China's understanding of "non-war military activities" and related terminology.

Characteristics of Crises

The terms “crisis” [危机] and “crisis control” [危机控制] appear frequently in authoritative Chinese writings on escalation control. Military Terms, the PLA’s official dictionary, defines a crisis as “a dangerous state that poses or may pose a serious threat to national security and social stability.” A related term is “military crisis” [军事危机], defined as “a dangerous state between countries or political groups that may lead to armed conflict or war.”¹¹ The Ministry of National Defense’s 2015 defense white paper says “effectively controlling major crises” [有效控制重大危机] and “properly responding to chain reactions” are part of the basis of China’s preparations for military struggle.¹² This is notably one of the only uses of the term “effective control” [有效控制] in a publicly available official document since the 2013 SMS, though it is unclear whether the term in the defense white paper is used with the same connotation.

The NDU’s 2020 revision of the Science of Military Strategy contains an especially detailed exploration of crisis management. It focuses particularly on “military crises,” which it describes as having three constituent factors: the major strategic interests of the parties are threatened; the situation is uncertain and the time for decision-making, response, and communication is tight; and there is a risk of escalation into war. Like the 2013 book, this version of the SMS also notes that military crises have become more common than war and direct armed conflict since the end of the Cold War, brought about by the intensification of geopolitical and economic competition, ethnic and religious conflicts, and territorial disputes. It says that military crises are now one of the most important ways to regulate national interests, especially in relations between major powers.^{vi}

According to the authors, military crises are both accidental and inevitable. Although they may appear to be triggered by chance events, in fact they are often the inevitable result of long-term failure to resolve conflicts of interests between countries. Accidents between countries with longstanding grievances or even hostilities are very likely to escalate into military crises, especially if at least one party believes it should take the opportunity to seize an advantage. On the other hand, countries that do not have fundamental conflicts of interest can effectively resolve sudden problems through timely communication without risking military crisis.

Another fundamental characteristic of military crises according to the text is that they are both progressive and sudden: they may manifest as unexpected emergencies but in reality arise through the accumulation of gradual changes. The gradual progression of many crises means it is difficult to identify critical turning points in advance, and crisis parties are often complacent, careless, and passive in their crisis management until it is too late. The 2020 SMS calls for China to focus not only on understanding the gradual progression of crises, but also on responding effectively to emergencies.

Military crises are also said to be both confrontational and controllable. Although not all interstate confrontations play out through military means, the military option is the “trump card” and final bargaining chip. Military crises can be controlled if all parties can find a balance of interest through bargaining, preventing the crisis from escalating to a military showdown. However, just because a crisis is controlled does not mean the underlying clash of interests has been resolved.

vi The NDU’s 2020 SMS also identifies many different types of military crisis, which can be seen in the Appendix of this report.

Finally, military crises contain both risk and opportunity. They are risky because they have potential to transform into war at any time, but on the other hand they present an opportunity for all parties to show their bottom line, figure out their opponents' cards, and ultimately reach a compromise.

Methods of Handling Crises

Science of Military Strategy (2020) describes handling military crises as an “art of compromise” [妥协]. “Compromise” in this case appears to refer to an outcome reached through the “fierce contest” [激烈博弈] of two parties with competing objectives, not necessarily an agreement reached purely through negotiation. In the process of reaching this compromise, attention must be paid to seizing opportunities amidst the crisis [危中搏机], taking benefits from within harm [害中取利], and striving for compromises more favorable to national interests. The text describes four common methods of handling military crises: containing the crisis [遏止危机], influencing the crisis [影响危机], making the best of the crisis [利导危机], and shelving the crisis [搁置危机].

Containing the crisis means taking measures to prevent the crisis from expanding in scope and escalating into war by controlling the goals, domain, scope, means, intensity, and tempo of the crisis – generally through peaceful means. It involves isolating the crisis within its original domain; preventing geographic expansion by blocking intervention by countries outside the crisis; relying on peaceful means such as negotiation while using more coercive methods such as arms embargoes, sanctions, military blockades, and ultimatums with caution to avoid chain reactions; and keeping the intensity of one's actions at some target level.

Influencing the crisis means taking corresponding measures to shape the development of the crisis, eliminating unfavorable factors brought about by the crisis, and preventing the expansion, prolongment, and escalation of the crisis. This may be done through direct intervention or by using an “outside” party^{vii} to intervene in the crisis (or both methods at once). This type of crisis management is stated to have three prerequisites: the risk of non-intervention is much greater than the risk of intervention; intervention does not cause severe damage to the core interests of relevant parties; and any uncertain consequences of intervention are bearable.

Making the best of the crisis means seizing opportunities created by the crisis to achieve goals and solve problems that are difficult to achieve or solve under normal circumstances. This method has three forms. The first is to take benefits from the crisis itself [危中取利], that is, to take advantage of the chaotic situation to achieve political goals and avoid the passivity and risks that might exist under normal conditions. The second is to use the opportunity to seek advantages [借机谋利], putting into practice military moves that had been planned for a long time but not yet carried out. The crisis would prevent opponents from reacting as strongly to China's otherwise provocative actions. The book gives the examples of the United States using the “opportunity” of the 9/11 attacks to station troops in the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as China's 2008 deployment of naval vessels to carry out escort missions in the Gulf of Aden in response to increased piracy in the region. The third way to make use of a crisis is to shift (political) pressure [转移压力] and gather the domestic population behind the government.

vii The text uses the term “局外人” (literally, “outsider”), but does not elaborate on what kind of entity such an outside party might be.

Shelving the crisis is an approach used to avoid war when it is too difficult in the short term for the parties to make substantive concessions. “Cold shelving” [冷搁置] is to freeze any factors affecting the crisis and leave the issue to be resolved at a later time. This requires all parties involved to remain calm and not trigger any further developments in the crisis. “Hot shelving” [热搁置] is to maintain the crisis in a relatively stable but still “controversial” state in order to warn the citizenry, regulate the other party(ies), and hold the attention of the international community.¹³ When any of these methods of crisis handling fail or become impossible, other methods should be substituted.

Table 2: Crisis Handling Methods in the NDU SMS 2020

Means	Subtype	Description
Contain the Crisis [遏止危机]		Use peaceful means to limit the scope, means, intensity, negative effects, etc. of the crisis
Influence the crisis [影响危机]	Direct intervention	Direct or indirect intervention to shape how the crisis plays out
	Indirect Intervention (use of outside party)	
Make the best of the crisis [利导危机]	Benefit from the crisis [利导危机]	Avoid passivity and risks of normal circumstances to achieve political goals
	Use the opportunity to seek advantages [借机谋利]	Implement military plans, using the crisis to moderate opponents' reaction
	Divert pressure [转移压力]	Unify public opinion behind the
Shelve the crisis [搁置危机]	Cold shelving [冷搁置]	Freeze all factors in the crisis to resolve later
	Hot shelving [热搁置]	Maintain the crisis at a stable but controversial state to keep attention on it

Crisis Prevention and Control in Other Sources

While not usually discussed in the context of effective control specifically, crisis management has been a well-covered topic in the past two decades of Chinese military scholarship. This section will review a sample of notable writings on this subject.

Chinese foreign policy experts such as Zhang Tuosheng [张沱生], director of the Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the PLA-affiliated China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS),^{viii} have noted the growing prominence of crisis management in Chinese military strategy since the end of the Cold War. Zhang argued in a 2011 paper that China used to resolve military crises through military means, deliberately escalating into armed conflict, but since the 1990s has transitioned to crisis management (control or de-escalation) and built strong mechanisms for crisis control. Consequently, China has managed to avoid direct warfare with other states

viii CFISS is a private Chinese think tank founded by former PLA officers. The think tank was originally under the CMC General Staff Department and funded primarily by the PLA. See: “8th China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics: Key Findings and Recommendations”, Pacific Forum CSIS Issues & Insights, 2013 (Vol. 14, No. 1), <https://>

for several decades.¹⁴

In 2012, the AMS journal *Military History* [军事历史] published a literature review of studies of military crisis management, particularly since the 1990s. The study, written by a member of the PLA's (since abolished) General Staff Department [总参谋部], identified key features of military crises and crisis management based on works by prominent Chinese military scholars such as Wang Yong [王勇], Liu Jixian [刘继贤], Cheng Xiaodong [成晓东] and Xu Xin [徐昕]. A military crisis is described as having three salient characteristics: they are complex, caused by both immediate and historical factors; controllable, preventable, or containable; and dangerous, a “crossroads between war and peace” that can escalate into armed conflict if not handled properly. This description is consistent with the understanding of military crises demonstrated in various recent editions of the SMS, including those published after this study.

Military crisis management is described as follows. First, it is political: military crises are triggered to serve political goals. Second, it is a form of emergency response: military crises are urgent events that can evolve unpredictably, and thus must be handled with urgency and flexibility. Third, it is long-term: the task of crisis management extends beyond the initial crisis and must continue working to prevent chain reactions and further crises. Fourth, it is comprehensive: military crisis management involves not only military but also political, economic, social, legal, diplomatic, geographic, and other factors, and must thus be dealt with in a coordinated cross-domain effort.

The study further says that crises can be managed through some combination of military, diplomatic, economic, and media means. The last of these means is notably not discussed in the SMS conception of “effective control,” but here it refers to the use of media to control information dissemination and guide public opinion. The main principles of crisis management dictate that it should be carried out according to the law; include consideration for prevention, quick response, and long-term overall planning; make full use of informatization; comprehensively integrate different means; adapt to changing circumstances; and focus on “transformation” – that is, grasp opportunities within crises.¹⁵

Overall, this literature review shows there is considerable continuity between the guidance on military crisis control provided in the 2013 and 2020 editions of SMS and earlier Chinese writings on crisis management throughout the 21st century.

In 2016, NDU professor Ji Mingkui [纪明葵] wrote a highly relevant article on crisis management that contained very similar definitions and language to the NDU's 2020 edition of the SMS.^{ix} Ji's article separates crisis management and control into pre-crisis, during the crisis, and post-crisis stages, each of which have different requirements. Pre-crisis management requires accurate prediction, planning, and preparation to prevent crises from occurring. This includes building good-neighborly relations with other countries through development of common interests, military aid, trade, security cooperation, and other means; constructing efficient and flexible institutions for crisis decision-making, and fully integrating early-warning and intelligence collection; establishing hotlines and emergency consultation mechanisms with other countries; and using military exercises to demonstrate strength and deter potential adversaries. Some of the activities Ji calls “pre-crisis” management fall into the “establishing posture” category of effective control.

ix It is unclear whether Ji was involved in writing the SMS himself (he is not credited as an author in the 2017 or 2020 revision) or whether he borrowed language from earlier editions of the NDU's SMS.

According to Ji, crisis management during a crisis may incorporate several approaches. Here Ji's article describes controlling crises (e.g. containing goals, scope, tempo, geographic scale, etc.) and taking advantage of crises in nearly identical language to the 2020 SMS. Other approaches in Ji's article include "defusing crises" [化解危机], controlling the circumstances [控制事态], and even "manufacturing crises" [制造危机]. These methods were not discussed in the 2020 SMS, at least in the same terms. The article had little to say about "post-crisis" management, except that it requires evaluating each crisis after it occurs and modifying future behavior based on the lessons learned.¹⁶

In 2021, Peking University Center for Maritime Strategy Studies [北京大学海洋战略研究中心] Director Hu Bo [胡波] wrote an analysis of the current situation in the South China Sea, framing it as a broadly trilateral conflict between China, the United States, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although Hu characterizes China as a passive and reactive player in the region, he acknowledges that "as long as China maintains its current rising momentum, its power and capabilities will continue to grow, and it will be seen by the United States and other countries as intending to challenge the status of the United States or even control the entire South China Sea." Hu further maintains that there is a real risk of a small- or medium-scale war breaking out as the result of an accident or miscalculation, making multilateral crisis management mechanisms all the more important. Hu's article appears more clear-eyed about the risks of miscalculation and inadvertent conflict spiraling than most PLA teaching texts and other writings by PLA-affiliated scholars, which tend to see peacetime military buildup as a deterrent and are optimistic about China's ability to unilaterally defuse or control crises.¹⁷ Finally, various scholars writing in scholarly journals or official media have acknowledged that China's theoretical guidance and established mechanisms for crisis control are still developing and imperfect.¹⁸ For example, Chen Yong's [陈永] 2019 work on US-China competition in the South China Sea noted that the two sides lack a complete set of rules on how to handle crises and confrontations between them, which increases the possibility of accidental crisis escalation.¹⁹ Similarly, Zheng Yiwei [郑义炜] of Tongji University's [同济大学] Military Teaching and Research Section [军事教研室] wrote in 2021 that the Maritime Air Liaison Mechanism established between China and Japan in 2018 was a useful but ultimately insufficient crisis control mechanism due to its vague guidelines and the lack of "strategic mutual trust" between the two countries.²⁰ The PLA Daily and other official media have published multiple articles in recent years calling for improvement or "modernization" of PLA military theory, including crisis management and deterrence.²¹

War Situation Control

War situation control [控制战局], sometimes called war control [控制战争], refers to activities during actual warfare "to adjust and control the war's goals, means, scales, tempos, time opportunities, and scope, and to strive to obtain a favorable war conclusion at a relatively small price," according to the SMS 2013. Military Terms has another definition: "to seize and control the initiative in a war or battlefield, and to control and restrict the situation of a conflict to achieve certain political and military purposes. This control is exercised through a number of non-military means, including public opinion and information operations."²²

According to the 2013 SMS, China should focus on limited goals during warfare, which are divided into two "layers:" political goals and military goals. The political goals largely do not change, while the military goals are subservient to the political goals and may be adjusted based on the progress of the war. When war operations go smoothly, the authors say Chinese leadership should prevent "blind expansion of the political goals," which could lead to escalation; when the war situation is unstable or not in China's favor and some military goals are no longer achievable, China must avoid "inappropriate recklessness."

In modes of warfare that the PLA is not skilled at, such as “large scale at-sea joint operations,” the SMS authors stress that preparation is more important than taking the initiative. They say that China should delay launching attacks unless there is “absolute assurance” of success. Once preparations are complete, Chinese forces should strike quickly to catch the enemy off guard, seize the battlefield initiative, and paralyze and destroy the enemy’s operational system.

The final component of war situation control is properly concluding a war. The 2013 SMS states that PLA strategists should thoroughly plan how to conclude the war and be flexible in selecting methods for doing so (such as ceasefire, transitioning into peace talks, military occupation, etc.) based on the adversaries’ posture and reaction. China should use a combination of post-war military, political, economic, and diplomatic activities to maintain pressure on the enemy, improve the internal and external strategic environment, and ensure that the new peacetime conditions are favorable to China.²³

The 2020 edition of the Science of Military Strategy published by the NDU contains a chapter on war situation control in the modern era of “informationized local wars” [信息化局部战争]. It states that war situation control is necessary not only to win wars but also to achieve political and strategic goals. Conditions of “informatization” in modern wars have increased the importance of four aspects of war situation control in particular.

The first aspect is winning the initiative in war [战争主动权]. The book says that the application of information technology to all levels of warfare (strategic, operational, and tactical), particularly since the Gulf War, has made it a priority for each side to maximize their effective control of the war situation while undermining the enemy’s control in the battle for the initiative.

Second is achieving good coordination between military and political, economic, and diplomatic means. “Informatization” has enabled timely and accurate means of controlling combat operations, making it much more possible to coordinate military and non-military means and to maintain cross-domain linkages. This development makes it easier to “achieve comprehensive victory” that meets strategic needs.

Third is reducing the risk of war. Information technology has enabled the development of new weapons and thus vastly increased the destructiveness of war. It has also sharply increased the complexity and uncertainty of factors in a war. These developments make it more critical for states to avoid war by maintaining control over their circumstances.

Fourth is improving the effectiveness of war. The book notes that even wealthy countries like the United States have difficulty bearing the high cost of modern war for a long time. Therefore, effective control should strive to reduce losses and limit resource expenditures during war.²⁴

War Situation Control in Other Sources

Much like crisis control, war situation control is a common subject of Chinese military scholarship independent of the broader umbrella concept of effective control. Official Party media and prominent journals have published numerous articles on the subject and its various aspects.

One recent example is a July 2020 PLA Daily article about the necessity of planning to “dominate the war

situation.” Much of this article contains very similar language to the discussions of war situation control and other aspects of effective control in the 2013 and 2020 SMS. In order to control the war situation, the author writes that China must first take care of the overall strategy, which includes shaping a favorable international environment to prevent the war from causing chain reactions in unwanted directions. This recommendation bears a close resemblance to what the 2013 SMS calls “establishing posture.” The author also stresses comprehensively planning how to begin, control, and end the war before it starts, so as to “win first, then seek battle [先胜而后求战].” This proactive planning should include precise delineation of each combat phase, the timing of each phase transition, precise control of the scale of combat, active guidance of the combat process, and a flexible grasp of the combat rhythm.

The article also offers guidance on beginning, controlling, and ending a war. China should strive to seize the initiative and control when the war starts. It must carefully design its “first shot” in a way that serves not only tactical but also strategic and political goals. Next, actively controlling the war situation means adjusting the operational focus of each “phase” of combat to suit that phase’s core combat missions and objectives. By adjusting and shifting the operational focus in each phase, the PLA can gain an advantage over the enemy, influence the enemy’s strategic judgment, change the trends of the battlefield situation, and guide the war in a favorable direction. Finally, China must strive for a favorable ending to the war. The author acknowledges that the ending and outcome of the war does not completely depend on the unilateral will of Chinese strategists, and that China may not fully achieve its objectives. Still, the overall guidance is to try to end the war decisively while there are favorable conditions and before there can be a major reversal in China’s fortunes. China should strive for the greatest results and smallest losses and to create favorable conditions for the post-war situation and peace settlement.²⁵

Another article on war situation control appeared in February 2020 in the PLA Daily as well as Qiushi, the CCP’s official theoretical journal. The article divides the task of war situation control into controlling the opening, controlling the “middle game” [中局], controlling risks, and controlling the end of the war. In brief, controlling the opening involves gaining information superiority over the adversary, proactively seizing opportunities to attack, and using propaganda to control public opinion to China’s benefit. Controlling the middle game means carrying out real-time control of combat operations to shape the war development in a favorable direction based on limited and predetermined goals. This includes controlling the tempo, duration, phase transitions, and multi-domain battlefield space of the war through the use of “informationized weapons and equipment;” controlling the means of war; and controlling the tempo and rhythm of the war. Controlling risks involves system control at the operational and strategic levels and disrupting the enemy network; controlling the “center of gravity” of the war; and controlling escalation through deterrence and other means. Finally, controlling the closing of the war includes controlling the timing, means, and overall situation of the war’s end.²⁶

These two articles are fairly representative of recent authoritative Chinese writings on war situation control. While they do not overlap perfectly with any version of the Science of Military Strategy and often contain more detail about particular topics, they are generally very consistent with the overall theoretical guidance of the SMS 2013 and 2020 editions, indicating that these books continue to be good representatives of Chinese strategic thought.

In addition, China’s theory of effective control has been shaped in part by lessons taken from PLA analysis of foreign wars. One representative example is a December 2012 People’s Daily article by two scholars of the Shijiazhuang Army Command College which analyzed the 2008 Russia-Georgia War. This war in many ways resembled the PLA’s ideal “effectively controlled” modern war: Russia seized the initiative, combined

multi-domain military and non-military activities to very quickly achieve strategic goals, solidified its control over unstable peripheral regions, prevented the involvement of outside parties, and promptly concluded the war on favorable terms to itself without getting carried away by success. The authors explicitly took four main lessons from Russia's actions. First, "correctly judge the situation and dare to challenge:" when the Georgian army attacked separatist forces and apparently Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia, Russia believed Georgia was secretly backed by Western countries and thus combined its military actions with a rhetorical "war" against the U.S. and European Union. Second, "implement efficient and fast countermeasures based on pre-war preparations:" nearby Russian forces conducting counter-terrorism drills in the Caucasus immediately switched to combat operations before Tbilisi could send reinforcements. Third, "use a variety of means to quickly achieve strategic goals:" Russia combined land, sea, and air attacks to quickly seize territory in Abkhazia, while simultaneously employing diplomatic, legal, and propaganda means to stress the legitimacy of its actions (it claimed to be protecting Russian nationals and fulfilling peacekeeping obligations). Fourth, "seize strategic opportunities to comprehensively balance the interests of all parties:" Georgia's attack on Ossetian separatists gave Russia an opportunity to seize greater control in South Ossetia, which Russia had long wanted. After rapidly achieving its objectives, Russia negotiated a peace agreement with the EU. The authors argue this showed a prudent consideration for other parties' interests because it allowed Western powers to save "face" by appearing as mediators while giving Georgia a way to avoid further escalation.

The authors make three concluding recommendations about crisis control based on this war. First, focus on effective control of a crisis (i.e., a war's inciting incident) and make strategic preparations for the worst-case scenario in order to maintain a first-move advantage; second, be good at seizing strategic opportunities to resolve the conflict, including using economic, diplomatic, military, and other means to create favorable conditions for resolution; and third, carry out strategic adjustments in response to changes in the situation.²⁷ It is worth noting that this article uses the term "effective control" [有效控制] despite being published prior to the 2013 SMS, hinting that the term may have been used in PLA strategic thinking before its debut in the SMS.

Warfare Domains in War Situation Control

The SMS discussions of effective control (or war situation control) do not clearly explain how their guidance may translate to actual military operations across multiple domains. The 2006 edition of the Science of Campaigns [战役学], the most recent version of a major text on warfighting operations put out by the NDU, provides some insight on this question even though it predates the effective control concept. The authors echo the SMS in calling for the PLA to "strive for the initiative" on the battlefield and write that "the use of high-tech weapons and equipment to paralyze the structure of the enemy's combat system [作战体系], to capture key areas supporting the battlefield first, and gradually expand to other areas of the battlefield" has become an important way to compete for the initiative. Both sides have rapid maneuverability and long-range strike capability that enables precision strikes on key targets and rapid destruction of the enemy's command and control system, which makes it even more important for China to aggressively seize the initiative.²⁸

The Science of Campaigns further stresses that in future informationized wars, mastering battlefield information and seizing air supremacy is key to controlling the battlefield. To seize and maintain "information dominance" [制信息权] on the battlefield, the text offers the following guidance: use the information combat forces of various services in a unified way; carefully organize reconnaissance to provide timely and accurate information about the enemy and battlefield situation; strengthen cybersecurity protection of joint operations information systems and

information confidentiality; use automated command systems to improve the efficiency of information collection, processing, transmission, and use; disrupt or destroy important enemy information systems such as command and control through electronic jamming, sabotage, or physical destruction.²⁹ In modern warfare, the text points out that military weapons and equipment are largely electronic, computerized, networked, and systematized, and that military decision-making and combat operations are highly reliant on timely, accurate, and uninterrupted information. Information dominance is thus a prerequisite to control of any other domain.³⁰

To gain air superiority, the book advises to focus mainly on the combat power of the air force and to utilize tactical missile units, army aviation units, air defense units, and special operations units jointly to target the enemy's air combat and air defense capabilities. The authors further stress the need for careful planning and coordination of various forces and operations while being flexible enough to maintain freedom of action in the main campaign, determining the scope of time and space to seize battlefield control based on the needs of different stages of the battle.³¹

As explained in the SMS 2020, the era of "informationized local wars" has made war situation control more essential because of the increased speed and destructive capacity of modern warfare and the added complexity of new domains such as space and cyberspace. A 2014 book published by NDU discusses the role of space information support operations, saying that the main strategic task of space operations is to support joint operations during informationized local wars. It states space operations should focus on supporting the main operational methods of joint operations, including the use of multiple services to contain, control, and win informationized local wars against strong enemies. They can assist in the integration of reconnaissance and surveillance, early warning detection, command and control, and fire strikes to seize the initiative and destroy the enemy's combat system.³² The guidance for space operations in this book echoes much of the more general war situation control guidance in the SMS.

The book further makes clear that space information support is vital to seizing control of the battlefield. It allows commanders to accurately assess the battlefield situation in real time, make decisions quickly, and organize and command operations before the enemy can make its move. In recent wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan, real-time battlefield information sharing among US-British coalition forces greatly shortened the process of acquiring, transmitting, and processing information, and carrying out attacks accordingly.³³ The book also notes that space information support forces can play a role in deterrence: by seizing and maintaining space information superiority over the enemy during a war, China can convey its superior battlefield control and deter the enemy from continuing to fight.³⁴

A postgraduate textbook on space warfare published by the Academy of Military Science in 2013 provides guidance on space deterrence and combat operations in various stages of conflict escalation – not only for war situation control, but also for crisis prevention and control. The authors argue that space-based deterrence works in a similar way to nuclear deterrence but has a much lower threshold for use. They identify four types of space deterrence actions that can be taken concurrently but more commonly form a pattern of gradual escalation in response to increasing levels of conflict intensity: space force display, space military exercises, space force deployment, and space deterrent strikes.³⁵

Space power display is typically carried out during peacetime and at the beginning of crises to prevent potential confrontations. It mainly involves carrying out public tests of various space equipment and using media to propagate information about the strength of China's capabilities. These displays of force may be completely

transparent, in order to deter potential enemies with a full display of strength, or semi-transparent, so that uncertainty about China’s full capabilities will deter rash military action. As the crisis escalates, China may carry out space military exercises against imaginary enemies to demonstrate its capabilities in actual warfare scenarios. These may be anti-ballistic missile and anti-spacecraft exercises, space assault exercises, or space information support exercises, which would each emphasize different aspects of China’s battle readiness in the space domain. If the crisis intensifies to the point that potential enemies make obvious combat preparations, China may deploy space forces to put additional pressure on the adversary. This may manifest as space force projection (i.e., launching and recovering spacecraft from space to transport astronauts and combat equipment) or adjustment of the structure and posture of already deployed space forces to suit the needs of anticipated combat operations. Finally, if all three of these non-violent deterrence methods fail to stop enemy advances, the authors call for punitive space deterrence strikes to warn the enemy that China is ready for war to safeguard its interests. These strikes may be “soft strikes” (information attacks, electromagnetic interference, and other disruptions of enemy communications) or “hard strikes” (use of space forces to carry out sudden, limited strikes on sensitive parts of the enemy’s combat system).³⁶

The deterrence logic displayed in these texts bears a resemblance to the “escalate to de-escalate” approach commonly associated with Russia. While displays of force in space or other domains may successfully deter enemy aggression in some instances, PLA writings on the subject do not appear to adequately address the possibility that escalating “deterrence” measures may be perceived as aggression and consequently trigger conflict.

Table 3: Summary of Effective Control in the SMS 2013

Effective Control Component	Goals	Description
Establishing Posture [营造态势]	Combine military and non-military means to create conditions favorable to China’s security, stability, and interests during peacetime	Strategic balancing to compensate for China’s relative weaknesses; building good relations with neighbors and influence over China’s periphery; strive for reunification with Taiwan through diplomatic and economic means
Crisis Prevention and Control [防控危机]	Prevent crises from occurring or from escalating into armed conflicts and wars; seek opportunities to advance Chinese interests	Use early-warning, monitoring, deterrence, and other means to prevent crises; when crises occur, use a variety of military and non-military means as appropriate to contain escalation and negative effects; address both symptoms and roots of crisis; “turn crises into opportunities”
War Situation Control [控制战局]	Control war escalation, win a rapid victory at low cost	Achieve fixed political goals while adjusting military goals as needed; carefully plan victory in advance and do not engage unless victory is assured; control the conclusion of the war to end it quickly, at low cost, and with a beneficial outcome (even if not all objectives have been achieved); control of war goals, means, scales, tempos, time opportunities, and scope

War Control: a Precursor Concept

The previous edition of the AMS's Science of Military Strategy, published in 2001 under the direction of Major General Peng Guangqian [彭光谦], contains a chapter on "war control." The text defines "war control" as follows: "the limiting and restraining actions the leader in a war takes consciously [to influence] the eruption, development, intensity, and the aftermath of the war." It goes on to say that the main objective of war control is to prevent wars, but once war becomes unavoidable, China "should control its vertical and lateral escalations and make every effort to pay a small price for a big victory."³⁷

The 2001 SMS's conception of war control, further elucidated in a 2006 journal article by the book's editor-in-chief Peng Guangqian, may be seen as a precursor to the later effective control concept because it encompasses not only "war situation control" but activities during stages of conflict below the threshold of war. According to Peng, the 21st century has seen a decline in "absolute war" and rise of "controllable war" – terms roughly comparable to "total war" and "local war" in the PLA spectrum of conflict – which has given new importance to strategic thinking about war control. War control in this conception includes "arms control" [军备控制], "crisis control" [危机控制], (armed) "conflict control" [冲突控制], and "local war control" [局部战争控制].

Arms control is an international collaborative endeavor to preemptively limit the destructive power of war. Peng argues that although arms control cannot fundamentally end war, it can regulate international military relations and build an atmosphere of mutual trust conducive to the prevention and control of war. He cites post-Cold War efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as an important start, but cautions that there is a long way to go in preventing future arms races and continuing to build international trust.

Unlike most other aspects of war control in the 2001 SMS, arms control is not directly included within the 2013 edition's effective control concept. However, it can be inferred to fit into the category of "establishing posture," since it is a peacetime activity intended to preemptively control and limit the effects of future conflicts. On the other hand, the 2001 SMS concept of war control does not include most of the other activities under the umbrella of "establishing posture."

Crisis control is primarily aimed at preventing crises from escalating into armed conflict or local war. A "crisis" is described as a tense state of "comprehensive political, economic, military, and diplomatic confrontation under relatively peaceful conditions" which has not resorted to force but is "close to the edge of war." Besides preventing escalation, crisis control strives to keep destructive and other negative effects of a crisis to a minimum, end crises in the shortest time and at the lowest cost, and prevent crises before they start. Carrying out military diplomacy and political dialogues, establishing mutual trust-building measures, and enhancing military transparency are all beneficial to crisis prevention and control. This concept is similar to the SMS 2013 concept of Crisis Prevention and Control, although it does not include seeking benefit from crises.

Peng does not strongly differentiate between control of armed conflicts and control of local wars, except that "the control objects differ in the scale and intensity of the conflict." In both cases, he stresses the need to prevent vertical [纵向] and horizontal [横向] escalation; that is, upward escalation in the intensity of conflict and outward expansion of the geographic scope of the conflict. Unlike the discussions of effective control and crisis control in the later versions of the SMS, Peng sees a role for the United Nations and international community to conduct conflict mediation, regulate conflict behavior, and even directly intervene to suppress the outbreak of violent conflicts.

The rest of Peng's discussion of war control after the outbreak of local war generally mirrors the 2013 SMS's guidance for war situation control: he states that war control must include strict control over the objectives, means, targets, methods, duration, and domain of warfare in order to contain the destructiveness, scope and scale of the war.³⁸

Section 2: Effective Control in Practice

Establishing Posture in Practice

As China has grown in its military, political, and economic capabilities, it has expanded its interests beyond its borders and increasingly sought to shape its strategic environment through a variety of means. Following the three core aspects of “establishing posture” as written in the AMS SMS 2013, this section will provide examples of China’s actions in “strategic balancing,” management of its periphery, and promotion of reunification with Taiwan.

Strategic Balancing

The SMS guidance on “strategic balancing” is that China should take the initiative during peacetime to strengthen its relative weaknesses, impede military expansion or alliances against China, contest military dominance of certain regions, increase the costs of enemy actions against China, and prevent crisis escalation.

In recent decades, China has used a variety of means (including those mentioned in the following subsection on periphery management) to shape a friendlier international environment and disrupt possible anti-China alliances. It has used economic leverage and security cooperation to build ties with neighboring countries and attempted to woo U.S. allies by exploiting rifts in their relations with the United States – an approach seen perhaps most notably with the Philippines,³⁹ but also used even with very close American allies like South Korea, which hosts thousands of U.S. troops.⁴⁰ The efficacy of these tactics has been undermined by China’s ongoing disputes with the relevant countries; for instance, China’s apparent attempt to seize Whitsun Reef in 2021 culminated in a joint US-Philippine naval operation to disperse the Chinese vessels, showing that even a China-friendly Philippine president may not overlook Chinese aggression indefinitely.⁴¹

China has had more success disrupting collective action by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), whose requirements for unanimous decision-making make it highly vulnerable to obstructionism. China has leveraged ASEAN members Laos and Cambodia, which are aligned with China, to prevent ASEAN from acting against Chinese interests in the South China Sea.⁴²

Finally, China’s continual military modernization and its buildup of military and dual-use infrastructure around its periphery greatly increase the costs of enemy military action against China and enhance China’s ability to seize the initiative and exercise effective control during crisis or war, should the need arise. For example, airport and road construction along the Sino-Indian border could allow for rapid deployment of PLA troops and aircraft against India,⁴³ while China’s island reclamation and facility construction in the South China Sea increase its surveillance and area denial capabilities in that area.⁴⁴ The PLA’s active defense strategy and the doctrine of effective control both stress thorough preparation for “worst case scenarios” during peacetime to ensure that China can handle any contingency and deter war through overwhelming preparedness (or even shows of force). However, it is clear that these same measures may sometimes trigger rather than deter conflict escalation – as subsequent sections will show.

Periphery Management

An important part of China's endeavor to "establish posture" during peacetime is maintaining friendly and cooperative relationships with China's neighbors, to prevent instability or conflict along China's periphery from threatening its national interests. China shapes its relations with countries on its periphery not only through diplomatic engagement but also through cooperation on trade, investment, and security operations. The goal is not only to improve relations but often to increase China's ability to influence policies and events in neighboring countries.

One key component of China's periphery management policies is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is a trillion-dollar global development strategy that includes Chinese-funded or Chinese-constructed infrastructure projects in dozens of countries around the world, including many of China's neighbors. This infrastructure investment strengthens economic linkages between China and the recipient countries and in many cases increases China's political leverage over those countries, even if the projects themselves are not always profitable. At its best, the BRI promotes economic development and prosperity in partner countries as well as in China's own underdeveloped western regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, through which several transnational "economic corridors" run. China hopes that economic development will reduce violence and instability in the relevant regions.

BRI projects may also serve geostrategic goals for China: transportation and energy infrastructure built up through projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Power of Siberia natural gas pipeline⁴⁵ can reduce China's dependence on maritime energy shipment and trade routes that are vulnerable to blockade or disruption. There has been speculation that many commercial port projects constructed as part of the BRI's Maritime Silk Road may eventually serve dual-use functions, for example as forward-deployment bases for the PLA Navy (PLAN).⁴⁶ If true, this would mean the BRI also contributes to "strategic balancing:" increasing China's relative military advantages and control in regions farther from its shores.

China also engages in security cooperation with neighboring countries. One major mechanism for multilateral security cooperation is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), consisting of China, Russia, most of the Central Asian republics, as well as India and Pakistan. SCO members work together to combat transnational terrorism and crime, including extremist and separatist networks, which are major concerns for China.⁴⁷ Outside the SCO, China collaborates with many countries in its surrounding region to fight extremism, crime, piracy, climate change, cybercrime, nuclear proliferation, and other non-traditional threats. These activities help China make its periphery safer and more stable while also strengthening mutual trust and military diplomacy with other countries.⁴⁸

Taiwan Reunification Policies

The 2013 SMS describes China's peacetime approach to countering Taiwanese independence, part of "establishing posture," as "attacking with the pen and preparing the sword" [文攻武备].

China's "31 Measures" issued in February 2018, later followed by an additional "26 Measures" in November 2019, are a representative example of the types of economic and diplomatic politics Beijing uses to strengthen cross-strait relations and facilitate future "reunification." These policies are meant to strengthen cultural, economic, and political ties between Taiwan and mainland China. They include giving Taiwanese residents equal

access to PRC consular services abroad, granting Taiwanese businesses operating on the mainland equal rights and access to capital as mainland-based enterprises, and various measures to promote cross-Strait investment, cultural exchanges, education, etc.⁴⁹

On the other hand, China also routinely carries out naval, air force, and other military exercises around Taiwan, including within Taiwan's air defense zone. These exercises serve the dual function of preparing the PLA for possible wartime scenarios while also signaling China's displeasure with Taiwan's "pro-independence" activities and "collusion" with the United States.⁵⁰ China's official rhetoric bridges the gap between its "carrot" and "stick" measures toward Taiwan by frequently stressing that its coercive tactics are aimed at curbing the activities of "pro-independence" forces which do not represent the vast majority of the Taiwanese people (even when they are the island's democratically elected government).

Crisis Prevention and Control in Practice

The recent editions of the Science of Military Strategy have all stressed the increasing prominence of military crises in modern-day international relations and the corresponding shift of PLA priorities toward crisis management. Indeed, since the early 1990s China has faced multiple international crises that have tested its crisis control abilities.

Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1995-1996

The Third Taiwan Strait crisis in 1995-1996 was the first major incident that precipitated the PLA's strong interest in crisis management. It began when Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui [李登辉] was permitted to visit the United States in June 1995, contradicting promises the U.S. Secretary of State had made to China. Lee proceeded to give a speech at Cornell University praising the achievements of the "Republic of China on Taiwan," which infuriated Beijing at a time of already difficult Sino-US relations. China responded by recalling its ambassador to the U.S., launching a media campaign labeling Lee a "splittist" [分裂主义分子], and beginning a series of surface-to-surface missile tests in the Taiwan Strait. Various types of military exercises continued for months under the direction of CCP and CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin [江泽民] (with corresponding exercises by Taiwan), leading up to Taiwan's presidential elections in March 1996. Fearing China would not de-escalate, the U.S. dispatched two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area around Taiwan, hoping this massive show of force would demonstrate U.S. resolve to defend Taiwan and intimidate China into backing down. After Lee won his election, Taiwan called off its own military exercises and the U.S. Navy left the area, marking the end of the crisis.⁵¹

An account of the crisis by Niu Jun of CFISS and Peking University's School of International Relations, heavily informed by the memoirs of Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen [钱其琛], offers a perspective on Chinese decision-making at the time. Beijing believed that the U.S. granted a visa to Lee to test China's "bottom line" on the Taiwan issue. China felt it could not trust Washington's words and had to take action to "deter Taiwan independence and teach the United States a lesson" [震慑台独, 敲打美国]. China's exercises sought to communicate to the United States the importance of the Taiwan issue to China while also influencing the political situation in Taiwan (i.e. the election). Niu blames the U.S. for causing the crisis and characterizes China's military exercises as a form of deterrence to prevent the situation from escalating. In his account, China never intended to start a military conflict with Taiwan or the United States. In fact, it announced in advance and strictly controlled the purpose, scale, time, and venue of each military exercise in order to prevent escalation.⁵²

While China's military exercises during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis communicated its position on Taiwan, they failed both as a means of crisis prevention and as a deterrent to Taiwan's "separatist" movement (after all, Lee Teng-hui won re-election). It can be inferred that Chinese policymakers failed to accurately predict that China's Taiwan Strait exercises would lead to escalation and did not expect the U.S. to intervene with such a show of force. This failure to predict and prevent escalation partly explains the PLA's motivation to develop a more defined and "scientific" doctrine of crisis control, which eventually evolved and was integrated into the effective control concept. On the other hand, today's Chinese military doctrine still falls short of adequately preventing similar miscalculations, especially considering more recent guidance to seek advantages from crises.

EP-3 Air Collision, 2001

China has faced several other crisis situations involving the United States throughout the 21st century. One major incident on April 1, 2001 occurred when a Chinese fighter aircraft flying to intercept a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft over the South China Sea caused a midair collision, killing the Chinese pilot and forcing the damaged U.S. aircraft to land at a military base in Hainan, an island province of China. The EP-3's crew was detained by Chinese authorities, whose leadership (under then-CCP Chairman Jiang Zemin) sought a formal apology from the United States for the Chinese pilot's death. Although the nature of the incident and other contextual factors made it unlikely to escalate to armed conflict, it nevertheless created a diplomatic crisis. The Chinese side claimed the American airplane had caused the collision by swerving suddenly toward the Chinese fighter and insisted that the U.S. accept responsibility. Washington dismissed this version of events as physically impossible and initially expressed "regret" for the loss of the Chinese pilot, whom it blamed for the accident.

Discussions of crises in the SMS describe them as being caused both by sudden accidents and by longstanding issues, and this case was no exception. While both sides accepted that the collision itself was caused by reckless flying rather than hostile intent, China also assigned blame more generally to U.S. military surveillance near China's territory and maritime claims, viewing this practice as a threat to Chinese security and the emergency landing in Hainan as a violation of Chinese sovereignty. China's demand for an apology was partly motivated by this broader grievance (which U.S. negotiators largely dismissed), as well as a need to appease a domestic audience that was mistrustful of the U.S. following the U.S. bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade two years prior. On the other hand, China wanted a strong and stable relationship with the U.S., whose support it needed to achieve ambitions such as entering the World Trade Organization (WTO) or hosting the Olympics. Thus, Chinese leadership sought to resolve the crisis diplomatically without linking it to other aspects of bilateral relations and resisted nationalist demands for more belligerent forms of retaliation. Ultimately, bilateral negotiations produced a letter in which the U.S. government said it was "very sorry" for the loss of the Chinese pilot and for the unauthorized breach of Chinese airspace. The Chinese government interpreted this as an apology, allowing it to save face and maintain its hard line on territorial integrity while defusing the immediate crisis. It allowed the U.S. air crew to leave Hainan twelve days after the collision.⁵³

While this part of the crisis was resolved relatively quickly due to the urgency of returning the crewmen to the U.S., negotiations over the return of the aircraft itself along with post-crisis management lasted several months. Zhang Tuosheng has written that joint crisis management mechanisms between the U.S. and China were very underdeveloped at the time, and that once the crew were returned the Bush administration took a much harder stance, attempted to walk back its perceived admission of blame, and refused to negotiate on the broader issue of U.S. surveillance operations in the South China Sea, which it insisted were legitimate and legal.⁵⁴

USNS Impeccable Incident, 2009

Most other Sino-US military confrontations in the past two decades also occurred in the South China Sea. As the U.S. regularly conducts surveillance, Freedom of Navigation Operations, and other nonviolent military operations in the South China Sea, it is often confronted by Chinese Coast Guard or maritime militia vessels that seek to enforce China's claimed sovereignty over the relevant island or maritime territory. One such crisis happened in March 2009, when the unarmed U.S. Navy ocean surveillance ship USNS Impeccable faced a coordinated cross-agency harassment campaign by Chinese ships and aircraft while conducting hydrographic survey operations south of Hainan Island. After Chinese sailors ordered the Impeccable to leave or "suffer the consequences," two Chinese fishing trawlers attempted unsuccessfully to target the ship's towed sonar array by running it over and snagging it with long hooked poles, prompting the Impeccable to fire at one trawler with a high-pressure water hose. The trawlers later coordinated with a PLA Navy intelligence ship, a Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) patrol ship, and a Chinese Marine Surveillance (CMS) cutter to block the Impeccable's exit for a time, before finally allowing it to leave. (The USNS Victorious suffered similar harassment in the Yellow Sea around the same time.)

US officials criticized China's "aggressive" actions and accused it of neglecting its UNCLOS obligations, while defending the "routine operations" of U.S. Navy vessels in international waters. Then-President Barack Obama sent a guided missile destroyer to the area to protect the Impeccable. On the other hand, Chinese officials insisted the U.S. was not legally permitted to conduct military operations in China's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), while defending Chinese actions as ordinary law enforcement. Both sides stressed their positions in public statements and official talks but expressed a desire to move past the incident; Chinese officials stressed that the incident must not harm bilateral military ties and appeared to de-escalate after the U.S. signaled it may protect its ships with armed escorts.⁵⁵

The SMS guidance on crisis prevention and control does not give much consideration to scenarios in which China deliberately initiates the confrontation, such as in the above incident and many other maritime confrontations; rather, it tends to write about crises as events that are bound to occur under certain geopolitical conditions. In this case, it has been speculated that China deliberately created the crisis as an opportunity to test the resolve of the new Obama administration while stressing its firm position on maritime sovereignty. While this does not appear to fit directly with the guidance of effective control in the SMS, "manufacturing crises" [制造危机] is mentioned as a possible crisis management method in Ji Mingkui's 2016 article on crisis management.

Nevertheless, some themes from the SMS 2013 and 2020 can be seen in China's behavior during this 2009 crisis. First, China contained the means of the crisis by using ostensibly unarmed fishing vessels to carry out the most directly confrontational operations, while military ships played a less active role. The Impeccable itself was unarmed and thus could not have escalated to violence at the time, so the use of armed military vessels against this unarmed survey ship would have sent an even more belligerent message and possibly triggered U.S. retaliation. Second, China made its position known by combining military means with diplomacy and state media messaging. China also used media statements and diplomacy to reduce the negative impacts of the incident on US-China relations, without backing down from its stance. Third, the standoff was a symptom of a broader international disagreement over the boundaries of China's maritime claims and over China's legal rights to restrict passage through its EEZ. This core issue remains unresolved and thus China has continued to harass foreign military vessels in these waters.

Sino-Indian Border Clashes, 2020-2021

One of the most explosive international military crises China has faced in decades was a series of violent clashes along its border with India in 2020 and 2021. This conflict's recency and volatility make it especially useful in evaluating how Chinese thinking on crisis control in PLA teaching materials has manifested in China's actions during actual crises.

China has multiple longstanding border disputes with India that date to the mid-20th century. Infrastructure construction and military activity on both sides of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border, have led to confrontations on many occasions since the 1962 Sino-Indian War. The most recent flareup of tensions is arguably rooted in India's 2019 reorganization of the disputed region of Kashmir, including territory claimed and administered by China, as well as infrastructure building by both sides along the border. In May 2020, Chinese and Indian troops patrolling the disputed border engaged in brawling near Pangong Tso Lake, and in June 2020 even more violent clashes broke out nearby in Galwan Valley following a significant Chinese military buildup there. In accordance with longstanding practices, both sides avoided the use of firearms (aside from firing warning shots⁵⁶) and fought with fists and improvised blunt weapons. Nevertheless, the clashes in Galwan Valley resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian troops and anywhere from four⁵⁷ to 45⁵⁸ Chinese soldiers. As the two governments negotiated a disengagement of troops from the conflict site, both countries blamed the other for crossing the LAC and taking provocative actions. Negotiations to de-escalate the border standoffs took place in several rounds over multiple months. In January 2021, China pulled back 10,000 troops from the border,⁵⁹ and in late February both sides completed a withdrawal of all troops from the area around Pangong Tso Lake.⁶⁰

Although little can be known for certain about Chinese decision-making in this dispute, China's actions appear to be consistent with PLA doctrine on crisis control in several ways. First, Chinese troops (and Indian troops) avoided directly firing at the other party and instead used unconventional weapons. This shows a regard for intensity and means control, as more conventional armed conflict would have been more destructive and carried greater risk of escalation. In fact, a 1996 bilateral agreement banned the use of firearms and explosives near the LAC to prevent escalation.⁶¹ Second, China has been very secretive about its losses during the relevant incidents, only admitting half a year after the Galwan Valley clash that it had suffered four casualties. This can be seen in part as a way to preserve the PLA's professional reputation with domestic and international audiences. In addition, secrecy about Chinese casualties gave China greater control over its public messaging about the crisis: it averted domestic nationalist outrage that might have been sparked by news of Chinese deaths and might have added pressure for greater military action, and instead kept the focus of negotiation primarily on questions of territorial rights and improper behavior by Indian troops. Beijing also insisted that the border dispute would not affect Sino-Indian economic cooperation.⁶² However, it was unable to prevent chain reactions from this crisis from affecting other aspects of bilateral relations: boycotts of Chinese goods spread throughout India, and the Indian government banned hundreds of Chinese apps including TikTok, AliExpress, and Wechat in the months that followed.⁶³ Third, China never backed down from its core position on the territorial disputes, refusing to recognize India's newly-organized Union Territory of Ladakh (where Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso Lake are located) and continuing to blame Indian troops for transgressions into Chinese territory. Insofar as China gained anything in the crisis, its actions clearly communicated its resolve to defend its territorial claims from perceived Indian aggression.

War Situation Control in Practice

China has not directly participated in a war since its 1979 invasion of Vietnam, long before the concept of effective control was introduced and before PLA strategists began to seriously prioritize crisis management as part of the PLA's mission. Therefore, there are no cases of China exercising the doctrine of "war situation control" as expressed in the Science of Military Strategy. However, China's experiences in past wars – both successes and failures – inform its strategic planning in the present. Examining China's past wars can also elucidate how Chinese thinking about war situation control has evolved over time.

Sino-Indian War, 1962

China's most recent wars were the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1978 Sino-Vietnamese War. The Sino-Indian War was fought over the disputed border territories of Aksai Chin in the far western border region (administered by China) and Arunachal Pradesh in the east (administered by India). Following a period in which India had sought friendly ties with China, India was alarmed to learn of Chinese road construction and troop movements in areas India had considered part of its own territory. The two sides held border negotiations in which China proposed formalizing the Line of Actual Control – the de facto border – and withdrawing the armed forces of both sides 20 kilometers from that border. India rejected the plan. In November 1961 India implemented a "forward policy" to defend its claims, setting up outposts deep in the disputed territories including beyond the LAC. This perceived aggression by India, combined with other actions such as granting safe haven to the Dalai Lama, prompted China to launch attacks on October 20, 1962 on both the eastern and western border regions simultaneously, catching India by surprise and quickly forcing India to abandon its forward outposts. China seized most of the disputed territory by October 24 and attempted to stop the conflict, proposing that both sides return to the pre-war status quo borders. India refused, and the war resumed on November 14. China continued to advance until it reached its own claimed border line on November 21 (effectively occupying all of Arunachal Pradesh), then declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew forces to 20 kilometers behind the LAC. China thus ended the war with an unambiguous victory but voluntarily ceded its captured territory in favor of returning to the pre-war status quo, which persists to this day.⁶⁴

PLA scholars Xia Chengxiao [夏成效] and Yuan Yi [袁艺] evaluated the 1962 Sino-Indian border war in 2013, the same year the AMS published its most recent SMS edition, and postulated that the war showed "controlling a war is more important than winning." Xia and Yuan portrayed Chinese actions during this war as highly restrained and disciplined: China attempted to resolve the dispute through peaceful negotiation before it erupted into war and again midway through the war, attacked only when its peaceful proposals were rejected, and voluntarily pulled back after achieving its goals in order to restore peace. The authors argued that the Chinese goal was not to militarily change the territorial status quo, but to use a show of force to deter India from future incursions into Chinese-held territory. In this regard the war effort was a success for China. China also maintained effective control of the timing, rhythm, and location of the war situation, and seized the initiative immediately, as demonstrated most strongly by its surprise simultaneous two-front offensive.⁶⁵ Another advantage of the timing (though not mentioned by these authors) was that the war coincided with the Cuban Missile Crisis, which kept the USSR and U.S. too preoccupied to intervene in the Sino-Indian War. If intentional, this timing control mirrors the SMS prescriptions to contain the geographical scope of conflicts and to take advantage of crises (in this case the Cuban Missile Crisis) to achieve strategic goals.

Sino-Vietnamese War, 1979

Compared to the Sino-Indian War, China's war with Vietnam played out less in China's favor, but it too holds lessons for China's future war situation control. After Vietnam invaded China-aligned Cambodia in 1978, Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping decided it must be taught a lesson, commenting to U.S. President Carter that "the little child is getting naughty, it's time he got spanked." The PLA launched cross-border attacks against Vietnam from February 17 to March 16, 1979, officially to defend Cambodia and punish Vietnamese aggression. In this regard the war effort largely failed: under-trained and under-equipped PLA forces performed poorly against Vietnamese troops and Vietnam continued to occupy Cambodia for a decade after the war ended. The material cost of this war also set back some of Deng Xiaoping's economic development plans.⁶⁶

On the other hand, China achieved some of its other political goals in the war: namely, strengthening CCP control of the PLA and undermining Soviet "encirclement" of China by revealing that Moscow was unwilling to defend its allies. The success of the latter goal was arguably a triumph of war situation control, reflecting a concerted Chinese effort to prevent Soviet intervention on the side of Vietnam. On one hand, Deng warned Moscow in advance of his plans to attack Vietnam and reassured Soviet leadership that the war effort would be strictly limited. He deliberately constrained the planned duration, geographic scope, goals, and methods of the war effort to prevent escalation, even barring the PLA Navy and Air Force from combat operations. On the other hand, Deng massed a majority of the PLA's forces along the Sino-Soviet border, correctly reasoning that the USSR would not be willing to risk war with China to defend Vietnam from a "limited" attack. When China ultimately withdrew from Vietnam (on its own terms, having declared the "lesson" taught), both countries claimed victory.⁶⁷ In China's case, the experience may be another example of war control being more important than winning.

While both these cases show Chinese applications of war control decades before the debut of effective control in PLA strategic thought, it is important to keep in mind how much has changed in China's approach to international conflict since that time. As Zhang Tuosheng pointed out, the 1990s marked a fundamental shift in Chinese strategy, moving from militaristic means of conflict resolution to a greater emphasis on crisis prevention and control. While recent Chinese tactics in the South China Sea and other disputed regions are perceived as increasingly aggressive, they are still far from the deliberate cross-border military offensives seen in the Sino-Indian and Sino-Vietnamese Wars. While China is willing to tolerate some conflict escalation and may even deliberately create crises, its overall approach is now much more patient and cautious than in its 20th century wars, focusing primarily on preventing wars from occurring when possible.

Conclusion

This study makes several observations and conclusions about China's theory and practice of effective control.

First, Chinese strategic thinking since the 1990s has shifted increasingly to a focus on controlling situations during peacetime, crisis, and war. During peacetime, China's ability to "establish posture" will continue to grow as China increases its capabilities and expands its national interests outward. China will also be able to shape its strategic environment through increasingly diverse means, including economic leverage, political influence, media discourse control, security cooperation, military infrastructure construction, military deterrence, cyber and intelligence operations, and psychological and legal warfare.

Second, although much of Chinese writing on crisis control is not dissimilar from Western thinking on managing escalation, in one respect Chinese strategic guidance is dangerously opportunistic. "Seizing opportunities" and "taking advantage of crises" is consistently presented in the SMS and other authoritative sources as a means or even a priority in the handling of crisis situations. This is potentially dangerous and at odds with the goal of preventing escalation: if China miscalculates, its opportunism can lead to conflicts spiraling out of control. Peacetime military buildup is also potentially escalatory – while effective control and active defense view continual preparation for military struggle as necessary for handling potential contingencies and deterring anti-China military action, in practice China's behavior has often alarmed other countries and triggered multiple international crises.

Third, China has developed a relatively large arsenal of tools and approaches to handle crises. While PLA strategic writings emphasize the preeminence of fixed political goals in crisis and wartime planning, texts such as the SMS 2020 offer a range of possible means and approaches for handling crises (such as containment and seeking opportunities) which may be used flexibly and adjusted based on the nature and evolution of each crisis. Guidance for war situation control also calls for flexibly adjusting military goals during the war effort and being highly responsive to changes in the situation.

Fourth, modern Chinese doctrine on war control (perhaps unlike crisis control) is very cautious: it calls for China to avoid war whenever possible, to be completely prepared and assured of victory before entering a war, and to seize the initiative and minimize both cost and duration of the war when war is unavoidable. This is a stark contrast to the Mao-era belief in winning wars by "drawing the enemy into the countryside." China is also far less willing to solve problems through direct military action, as it did in its wars with India and Vietnam.

Fifth, when China does fight wars in the future, it anticipates they will be informationized local wars. This limited but relatively complex form of war will require engaging in multiple domains, coordinating military and non-military efforts, and integrating information technology into every aspect of the war effort. The nature of informationized local wars greatly increases both the importance and the range of means of effectively controlling the war situation in China's favor, while also disrupting the enemy's control of the war situation through multi-domain strikes of critical nodes.

Sixth, China assumes that all or nearly all future conflict will be controllable, particularly if China manages to seize the initiative. This assumption has been consistent in Chinese writings on escalation control since at least 2001, which fail to adequately consider the possibility that escalation or conflict spiraling may occur purely by accident.

Finally, the PLA is constantly learning from its own experiences and the experiences of other countries to develop its theoretical guidance for peacetime, crisis, and wartime situation control. While there is continuity between various editions of the SMS and other (older) writings, the theory of effective control is a work in progress and will continue to evolve in the coming years.

Appendix: Types of Military Crisis in the NDU SMS (2020)

The 2020 SMS identifies various types of military crisis, based on different cross-cutting characteristics. These types of military crisis are summarized in the following table.

Table 4: Types of Military Crisis in the SMS 2020

Criteria of Distinction	Type	Description
Cause	Traditional	Caused by territorial and maritime disputes; resource disputes; ethnic and religious conflicts; geopolitical conflicts
	Non-traditional	Caused by international terrorism; pirate attacks; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
Intent	Accidental	Caused by unexpected events or accidents. Risk of escalation is often small.
	Deliberate	"Edge control" (Brinkmanship) Initiator deliberately pushes a confrontation to the brink of war to force the other side to give in, but does not wish for war. Risk of escalation due to loss of control is relatively high.
	War-oriented	Initiator deliberately provokes a crisis and intends to start a war: the crisis is just an excuse or precursor.

Intensity	Low-intensity crisis (quasi-crisis)	"Sudden events" which rarely have much impact on international relations
	Medium-intensity crisis	Tense confrontations often involving planned and premeditated military actions; have a relatively greater impact on international relations
	High-intensity crisis (quasi-war)	Armed conflicts often accompanied by a certain intensity of combat operations; high-impact and high risk of escalation to war
Suddenness	Gradual	
	Sudden	
Relationship between participants	Crisis between great powers	
	Crisis within a political bloc [政治集团]	
	Crisis between a large and a small country	
	Crisis between traditionally hostile countries	

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