

SSI's PLA Conference examines People's Liberation Army logistics, sustainment

By Carol Kerr, Public Affairs Officer 05 April 2022



US Army Pacific Cdr Gen. Charles Flynn set geo-political context & urgency for SSI's annual conference on the Chinese People's Liberation Army - analyzing PLA Logistics, Sustainment, led by SSI director Dr. Carol Evans, Mar 31-Apr 2, @ArmyWar College

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Russian assaults on Ukraine have the world's attention, but it is the PRC and the People's Liberation Army that loom as the U.S. military's pacing challenge, given its aggressive regional and global trajectory. The Chinese economy is four times that of Russia. U.S. trade with China is increasing while it is decreasing with Russia. And, China's military expenditure is four times that of Russia.

The PRC poses a substantial and robust threat operating from an ever-increasing position of strength, asserted three speakers who set the context for the Strategic Studies Institute's Conference on the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA conference is an annual gathering for information sharing and analysis among China watchers – this year focused on PLA logistics and sustainment. US Army Pacific Commander Gen. Charles Flynn, US Army War College Commandant Maj. Gen. Dave

Hill, and conference director Dr. Roger Cliff began the 2.5 days of open source and classified discussions, March 31 – April 2, at the Army Heritage and Education Center and at USAWC Collins Hall Carlisle, Pa.

“Events such as the PLA Conference foster important collaboration among the brightest minds from academic, the uniformed ranks, and the intelligence community on critical security issues facing our nation,” said Hill, tying this conference to the Army War College core purpose to educate the Army and Joint Force leaders through education, thought, and analysis on policy, strategy and security studies.

The invite-only roster was deliberately built to feature both functional expertise and analytical depth, with highly qualified experts representing the U.S. intelligence community, policy community, scholars in professional military education, and military logisticians, said Dr. Carol Evans, director of the USAWC Strategic Studies Institute, SSI. .

Flynn spoke to the role of scholars and analysts as vital to the Defense community for in-depth understanding and analysis. As the PLA shifts its focus, structures, and practices to support an expeditionary military, analysts and specialists leverage this forum to draw observations from the PLA’s own writing and activities and confer on findings and future focus.

The USARPAC commander connected the dots from the conference topic to the U.S. military to military relationships and exercises across the Asia Pacific region, where landpower matters greatly. Across the region, armies are stabilizing the architecture of the region, he noted. Flynn seeded the discussions to follow with his insights about strategies, like Operation Pathways, as steps to bolster strategic readiness and increase confidence of allies and partners through interoperability.

And logistics is critical to winning on the battlefield. A recurring theme of the conference was the cautionary tale created by Russian logistical challenges during its war on Ukraine. As we watch and learn, so too does China, said several experts.

Col. George Shatzer, who leads SSI’s Research and Analysis Department, spoke about the focus on logistics.

The China analyst community, he suggested, are particularly interested in PLA logistics capabilities. Conference speakers addressed centralized structures for joint logistics force support and specific Service capabilities, e.g., readiness to support the at-sea Navy, air combat operations and PLA army logistics, as well as its ability to sustain air power projection and the

PLA base in Djibouti.

Papers were presented by scholars and analysts from the National Defense University, Defense Intelligence Agency, National War College, National Ground Intelligence Center, Office of Naval Intelligence, Air University's China Aerospace Studies Institute, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Marine Corps University, among others. SSI will publish the collection. The 2018 PLA Conference Report, is available at [The People in the PLA 2.0 \(armywarcollege.edu\)](#). PLA expansion and evolution can be tracked through conference reports, e.g. [Colloquium Brief: Learning By Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad — SSI \(armywarcollege.edu\)](#) ... [Other People's Wars: PLA Lessons from Foreign Conflicts — SSI \(armywarcollege.edu\)](#) ... [The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military — SSI \(armywarcollege.edu\)](#) ... [Exploring the "Right Size" for China's Military: PLA Missions, Functions, and Organizations — SSI \(armywarcollege.edu\)](#).

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