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Chinese military launches two new wings for space and cyber age

President urges army to adapt to digital era as Beijing sets up separate command for land forces

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President Xi Jinping hands over a military flag to General Li Zuocheng, commander of the newly established general command of the PLA's Army. Photo: Xinhua

China has officially launched two new wings of the military and established a separate command for ground units as it presses on with a massive overhaul of the armed forces.

The Central Military Commission also released a guideline on Friday aimed at driving the rest of the reform programme.

At an inauguration ceremony in Beijing on Thursday, President Xi Jinping conferred flags on the new PLA Rocket Force and PLA Strategic Support Force, as well as the general command for the Army of the People's Liberation Army.

The Rocket Force is founded on what was the Second Artillery Corps – the PLA's strategic missile force – and will take charge of missiles and rockets, according to a source close to the army.

The Strategic Support Force would be responsible for hi-tech warfare in space and on the internet, the source said.

Defence ministry spokesman Yang Yujun said on Friday that the creation of the rocket force was consistent with China's nuclear policy and strategy.

Xi said the inauguration of the commands of the three forces was a strategic step to establish a modern military system with Chinese characteristics.

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In its guideline, the CMC said the defence system would be restructured to build a modern military for the information age by 2020, with most of the

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reforms expected to be completed by the end of this year.

It follows sweeping changes to the military's leadership and command system last year.

Once the changes are in place the CMC will take direct charge of administering all military wings, including the PLA, the People's Armed Police, and the militia and reserve forces.

Under the plan, four main vertical chains – command, development, administration and supervision – will be better defined with clear lines for decision-making, planning, implementing plans and evaluating processes.

The five battle zone commands, which replace seven military regions, will focus on combat, and each of the various military services will pursue their own development.

The departments of General Staff, Political, Logistics, and Armaments – or the so-called “four general departments” of the CMC – would be devolved into various departments to streamline the organisation.

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The guideline also calls for the creation an integrated command system that can operate in both war and peace time.

The main changes to the composition of the armed forces, military academies and colleges, and armed police will be completed by the end of this year. The militias will also be trimmed and reorganised.

More adjustments and improvements will be rolled out gradually from 2017 to 2020, as conditions allow, according to the guideline.

At the inauguration ceremony, Xi urged the army to adapt to the digital age, explore new approaches in land warfare and transform itself into a powerful modern land force.

He told the Rocket Force to improve nuclear deterrence and counterstrike capacity and advance its medium- and long-range precision strike ability.

He called on the Strategic Support Force to leapfrog developments in key fields.

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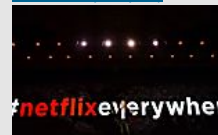
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