How China Fights

Against a U.S. Army Brigade Combat Team

Intentionally Left Blank

Contents

Executive Summary

In a potential large-scale combat operation (LSCO) between the United States and China, a U.S. Army brigade combat team (BCT) would face a People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army heavy combined arms brigade (HCAB) that is determined, aggressive, and capable of fighting in all domains. The PLA would task-organize its forces using a layered, multidomain approach aimed at disrupting and paralyzing the adversary's operational system. The HCAB would receive direct and indirect combat support from across the PLA joint force, including space; cyber; electronic warfare (EW); intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and fires.

A U.S. Army BCT defending against an attacking PLA Army HCAB would contend with a phased operation designed to isolate the BCT from the division, paralyze BCT command-and-control and fires systems, and ultimately cause the BCT to culminate before the HCAB commits its main forces. This would include shaping operations to gain information dominance through reconnaissance, fires, and EW, massed fires and effects supporting the HCAB's main effort, and aggressive maneuver and the employment of brief, violent volleys of both kinetic and nonkinetic fires on the objective.

A U.S. Army BCT attacking a PLA Army HCAB would encounter an active, elastic, and deep system designed to lure, attrit, and ambush an attacking force before destroying it with a decisive counterstrike. This would include shaping operations focused on delaying, channeling, and attriting the BCT; spoiling attacks and counterreconnaissance; extensive use of denial and deception to disrupt and delay the BCT; and aggressive counterattacks to exploit opportunities or seal points of penetration.

Operating against an HCAB in LSCO would challenge the BCT's intelligence, fires, and protection warfighting functions due to the PLA's focus on gaining and maintaining information dominance, massed fires, and purpose-built, systems-focused combat effects. The HCAB's reliance on reconnaissance as part of its information dominance campaign suggests the BCT may need to conduct continuous counterreconnaissance throughout all phases of operations. The HCAB's massed fires, supported by robust reconnaissance efforts, would enable a focused and dedicated counterbattery effort. The PLA's approach to systems warfare, manifested at the tactical level as the task organization of theater and group army assets to the HCAB, suggests that BCT protection systems will be challenged by nontraditional fires and effects. Finally, accurately emulating PLA combat equipment in training and at Combat Training Centers with opposing forces (OPFOR) may provide the BCT with more realistic training events and better prepare the BCT to gain and maintain the advantage during LSCO.

Introduction

U.S. national security policy designates China as the pacing threat for the United States, with the 2026 National Defense Strategy directing the Department of War to maintain a favorable balance of military power in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, it is crucial for the U.S. Army to understand China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). If the CCP chooses to employ the PLA more assertively to advance its regional and global interests, the U.S. Army must be prepared to play a leading role as part of the Joint and Combined Force in potential conflicts with China. A thorough understanding of China's military capabilities is crucial to protecting U.S. interests, deterring Chinese aggression, and ensuring victory in any potential Indo-Pacific conflict.

This paper builds upon the work presented in T2COM OE Threat Assessment 1-1, *How China Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. That publication, disseminated in April 2025, addressed the conditions of large-scale combat operations (LSCO) as they apply to China, provided an analysis of the CCP's security perceptions, its approach and strategy for conflict, and the PLA's organization and warfighting capabilities across all domains. It provided vignettes that addressed how PLA echelons above the brigade level would organize forces, integrate joint capabilities, and conduct operational-level maneuver to achieve its strategic objective.

This paper advances work presented in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, providing a sharp focus on tactical operations. While ATP 7-100.3 addresses how the PLA ground forces might operate at the brigade and battalion echelons, it does not address LSCO from the perspective of a U.S. Army brigade combat team (BCT). Accordingly, this paper seeks to describe the specific equipment, formations, and effects that a U.S. Army BCT would encounter over time against a comparable PLA Army heavy combined arms brigade. By providing these details from the BCT's perspective, this paper aims to inform U.S. tactical formations preparing for Combat Training Center rotations, enable Soldiers and Leaders to envision situations and conditions inherent in potential LSCO with the PLA, and provide units and opposing forces teams with threat training material.

This document is the result of T2COM analysts' continuous study of China and the PLA. This work also stems from routine collaboration across the Army Intelligence and Security Enterprise, as well as with the Intelligence Community and allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific. T2COM would like to give special thanks to the National Ground Intelligence Center and the Army War College's China Landpower Studies Center for their support in this effort.

PLA Task Organization for LSCO

In a potential large-scale combat operation (LSCO) between the United States and China involving a U.S. Army brigade combat team (BCT) and a PLA Army heavy combined arms brigade (HCAB), the PLA would task-organize its forces through a layered, multidomain approach rooted in its doctrine of systems confrontation. Systems confrontation aims to disrupt and paralyze the adversary's operational system by integrating assets from the theater commands, group armies, and the brigade itself. As the PLA Army's primary fighting force, the HCAB would operate against a BCT as the focal point of a convergence of effects from all domains, not in isolation.

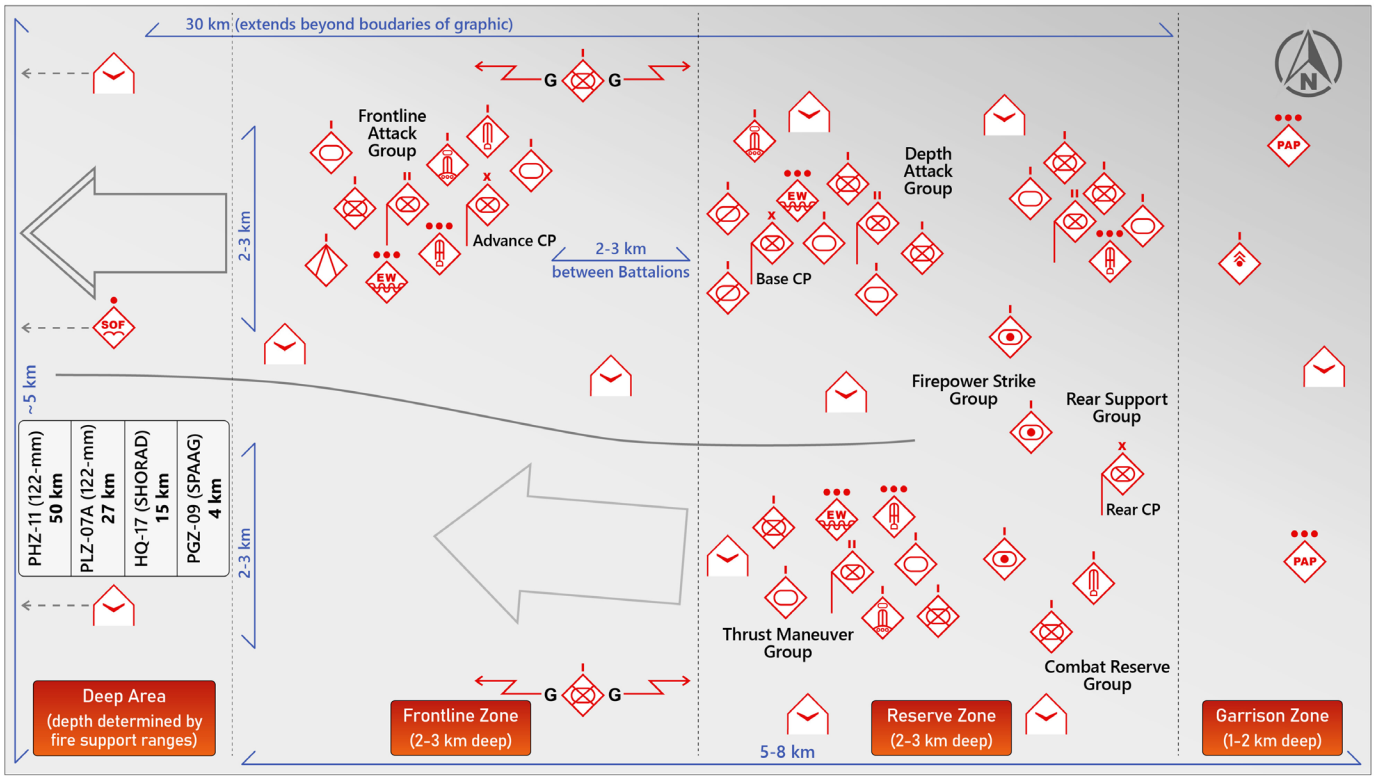
A cornerstone of PLA doctrine is achieving information dominance, the goal of which is to create confusion, slow decisionmaking, and isolate the Joint Force. While not in direct support of an HCAB, the PLA's Information Support Force (ISF), Cyberspace Support Force (CSF), and Aerospace Support Force (ASF) would mount coordinated space, cyber, and electronic warfare (EW) operations against U.S. command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting systems. In support of the HCAB, group army EW units would coordinate with artillery and air defense to target enemy systems, focusing on jamming and electronic surveillance at the tactical level to protect the HCAB. The PLA would likely prevent the Joint Force from providing the level of support a BCT has come to expect from two decades of counterinsurgency operations. Furthermore, PLA information dominance operations would directly impact the ability of corps and division to conduct shaping operations for the BCT.

The HCAB would also receive a wide variety of ISR support from across the PLA. In addition to offensive operations, the ISF, CSF, and ASF enable joint, integrated, multidomain intelligence collection. The HCAB would also benefit from air-, space-, and maritime-based ISR platforms providing over-the-horizon and multispectral collection of information feeding into an integrated joint common operating picture. The HCAB would likely receive indirect support from the theater command's intelligence and reconnaissance brigade. This brigade employs a mix of manned and unmanned systems, including medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial systems (UAS), to conduct deep reconnaissance and provide targeting information for long-range fires. This creates a potent reconnaissance-strike complex, allowing the PLA to find and destroy key targets far beyond the front lines.

The HCAB would receive general and direct fire support from a multitude of sources. The PLA Rocket Force has the range, speed, and magazine depth to execute ballistic and cruise missile strikes at critical times and locations in support of PLA Army operations. The group army's artillery and aviation brigades are also key enablers, equipped with long-range multiple rocket launchers and attack aviation. This allows the group army to conduct deep strikes, targeting operational-level command posts, long-range fires formations, and sustainment nodes. Modern PLA Air Force fighter aircraft like the J-10 and J-16 would engage in close air support and air interdiction while also neutralizing air threats. PLA Navy surface combatants, such as the Type-052 (Luyang-class) destroyer and Type-055 (Renhai-class) cruiser, can also provide long-range ballistic and cruise missile strike capabilities against ground targets.

U.S. Army BCT Defending Against a PLA HCAB Attack

A U.S. Army BCT defending against an attacking HCAB would contend with a multidomain, phased operation designed to isolate the BCT from the division, paralyze BCT C2 and fires systems, and ultimately cause the BCT to culminate before the HCAB commits its main forces. The HCAB attack would unfold in six phases over approximately 24 hours. This is in addition to approximately 7 days of shaping actions involving PLA group army and higher echelons' ISR, fires, and EW systems. The group army would further task-organize organic assets to the HCAB to ensure it has sufficient combat power to achieve tactical success against the BCT.



Not drawn to scale

Legend

PAP	People's Armed Police	EW	Electronic Warfare	SHORAD	Short-Range Air Defense	G	Guard
SOF	Special Operations Forces	CP	Command Post	SPAAG	Self-Propelled Antiaircraft Gun		

Figure 1: Threat Model for a PLA Army HCAB Attack (Source: T2COM G-2)

Phase 1: Shaping and Isolation (D-7 to H-Hour)

In this phase, the BCT would observe the effects of shaping operations by group army and higher echelons focused on gaining information dominance through reconnaissance, fires, and EW. Approximately 7 days prior to contact, group army special operations forces (SOF) brigade teams of 12 soldiers each, equipped with small UAS, similar to the DJI Matrice, and CH-901 loitering munitions, would insert in the BCT's area to conduct reconnaissance and potentially direct action to effect C2 nodes, fires systems, and logistics areas. During this phase, group army supporting fires, queued by SOF and other higher ISR assets, would conduct preparatory fires focused on critical C2, fires, and air defense systems within the BCT. Within 15 to 20 kilometers of the forward line of troops (FLOT), BCT security elements would likely observe 5 to 10 smaller Group 1 and 2 UAS, such as the CH-91, and team- to squad-sized elements of mounted and dismounted reconnaissance. These formations would likely not become decisively engaged. Rather they would seek to identify and report on the BCT's obstacle belts, frontline trace, and defensive line gaps. The BCT may also begin to observe EW effects from the HCAB's EW company. This would come in the form of direction finding and jamming of C2, ISR, and precision munition strikes.

Phase 2: Advance and Fixing the Force (H-Hour to H+4)

At H-Hour, the BCT would likely experience a full-spectrum electronic attack as the HCAB employs 6 to 12 mobile EW systems, such as the DZ-9001 and CSZ-181, conducting electronic attack and electronic protect to gain and maintain information dominance. This would potentially impact BCT C2, ISR, and fires systems as the HCAB attempts to blind the BCT's sensing system. The BCT would observe an increasing number of reconnaissance elements launching first-person view small UAS, in conjunction with one to three fixed wing UAS. These platforms would provide situational awareness and targeting data to the HCAB commander and firepower system. The BCT could expect initial HCAB fires to consist of PLZ-07 122-mm cannon and PZH-11 rocket fire conducting counterbattery, preparatory, and harassing and suppressive missions against the BCT's C2, fires, and air defense assets.

The BCT would observe the advance of the HCAB's frontline attack group, a fixing force composed of two or three PLA Army heavy combined arms battalions (HCABn), to within direct fire range. The fixing force would advance in company-sized groups of ZTZ-96A main battle tanks (MBTs) and ZBD-04A infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) attacking to fix identified U.S. battalion battle positions. Each attacking company would employ three to five first-person view UAS for ISR, counterreconnaissance, and attack, as well as have six PLZ-10 120-mm self-propelled mortar howitzers in direct support. BCT aerial assets would encounter an air defense umbrella of 4 to 10 PGZ-07 and PGZ-95 radar-controlled antiaircraft artillery guns, two to four HQ-17 short-range air defense systems, and approximately 10 dispersed HN-6 MANPADS teams. BCT UAS may also come into contact with group army aviation brigade Z-10 and Z-19 attack helicopters executing counter-UAS missions.

Phase 3: Unfold and Decisive Action (H+4 to H+8)

In this phase, the BCT would observe the HCAB setting conditions to enable the penetration of its main assault group, the depth attack group. The BCT would continue to face challenges in the EW and air environments, especially as the HCAB begins to focus on its main penetration point. Division and higher echelon assets provided to the BCT may be challenged to provide full effect given higher level PLA shaping operations in all domains. Tactically, the BCT would continue to defend against the frontline attack group attempting to disguise the main effort and isolate the objective area by conducting limited and probing attacks while maneuvering into support positions. The BCT would observe HCAB reconnaissance elements deeper in the BCT's area, seeking to identify the BCT's reserve, C2, and fires nodes. BCT reconnaissance would begin to observe the HCAB main effort, the depth attack group, consisting of one or two maneuver battalions with 30 to 50 armored vehicles, move into attack positions within 2 to 3 kilometers of the penetration point to initiate penetration. The depth attack group would include MBTs and IFVs and also be heavily weighted with engineering equipment, such as the GSL-133 minefield breaching vehicle and the GQL-111 bridging system.

Phase 4: Initiate (H+8 to H+12)

The BCT would observe the HCAB committing its depth attack group to the main point of penetration, weighting its main effort with massed fires and effects. The BCT would contend with a massive fire strike mission conducted by HCAB organic 122-mm fires and group army PLZ-05 155-mm self-propelled howitzers and PHL-03 and PCH-191 mulitiple rocket launchers. BCT reconnaissance forces would encounter a stiff counterreconnaissance fight from UAS, fires, and EW, seeking to prevent the BCT from determining the penetration point. The BCT elements at the point of penetration would observe a platoon-sized mobility engineer element moving forward to breach obstacles, supported by 122-mm cannon fire, smoke employment, EW attack, and airborne fires from Z-10 and Z-20 attack aviation. The BCT would also observe the deployment of nine Red Arrow AFT-10 antitank guided munition (ATGM) carriers to provide overwatch of the breach. The BCT's fires systems would receive counterbattery fire from the HCAB's 122-mm rocket systems and potentially group army fires assets as well.

As the breach progresses, the BCT would observe the movement of the depth attack group to break into the BCT's deep area, secure the far side of the breach, and establish support by fire positions for the thrust maneuver group. The BCT's reconnaissance system would likely observe the forward positioning of the thrust maneuver group, consisting of 20 to 30 MBTs and IFVs, to an attack position within 2 to 3 kilometers of the breach.

Phase 5: Annihilation and Exploitation (H+12 to H+20)

With the breach secured, the BCT would observe the thrust maneuver group attacking into the BCT's rear area to encircle forces, isolate bypassed units, and destroy rear area forces. The BCT would encounter aggressive maneuvers and the employment of brief, violent volleys of both kinetic and nonkinetic fires. Bypassed BCT units would defend against depth maneuver group attacks to reduce resistance. BCT units attempting to retrograde, reorganize, or conduct a counterattack would likely observe dedicated HCAB reconnaissance assets providing their locations to fires and EW systems.

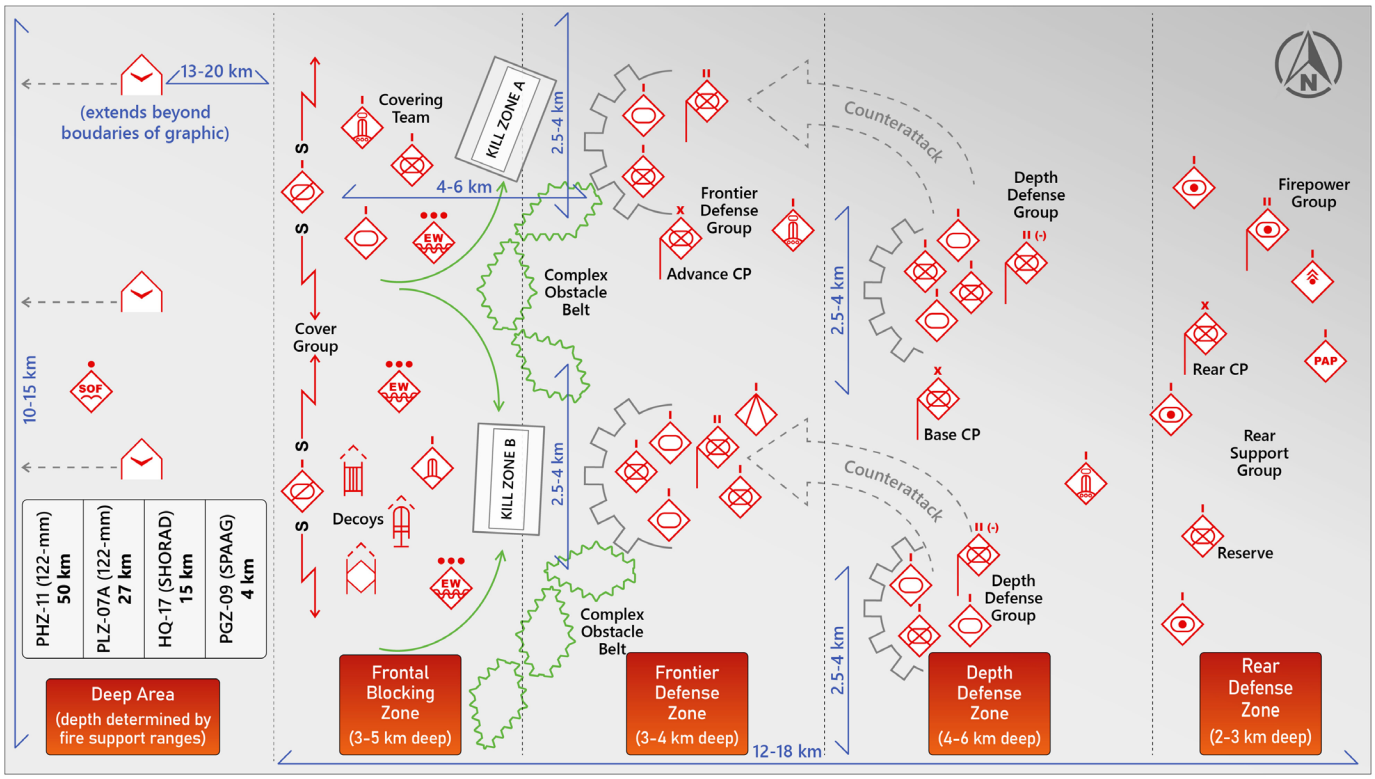
Phase 6: Continuing Operations (H+20 to Change of Mission)

In this phase, the BCT would observe the HCAB rapidly transitioning to consolidation, reorganization, and preparation for a counterattack. Remaining elements of the thrust maneuver group would establish a hasty defense within what was the BCT's deep zone to destroy any remaining BCT enablers, actively deny U.S. reconnaissance of its new positions, and employ HCAB reconnaissance systems to identify possible attack positions and avenues of approach for a BCT counterattack. The BCT would also observe the HCAB establishing a reserve consisting of a battalion-minus or company-plus mixed formation of MBTs, IFVs, and ATGMs depending on the situation. This would provide the HCAB with flexibility to respond to BCT counterattacks or exploit additional offensive opportunities. The HCAB commander would also establish three highly survivable, dispersed command posts—a base, rear, and reserve—consisting of three to six wheeled and tracked C2 vehicles each.

The BCT would observe the forward movement of the HCAB service support battalion, consisting of 40 to 60 wheeled and tracked vehicles, such as fuelers, transporters, cargo carriers, and wrecking cranes, establishing hasty refuel, rearm, and repair sites. The BCT would also observe the HCAB's operational support battalion, consisting of 40 to 60 wheeled and tracked support vehicles, including ambulances, decentralizing operations into three to six vehicle platoon-sized elements providing dispersed support. Additionally, the HCAB's combat support elements, fires, and EW would task-organize elements to provide protection for C2 and sustainment nodes.

U.S. Army BCT Attacking a PLA HCAB

A U.S. Army BCT attacking a PLA Army HCAB would encounter an active, elastic, and deep system designed to lure, attrit, and ambush an attacking force before destroying it with a decisive counterstrike. An HCAB defense would unfold in four phases over the course of approximately 8 hours. This is in addition to approximately 7 days of shaping actions involving the PLA Army group army and higher echelons' ISR, fires, and EW systems. The group army would task-organize organic assets to the HCAB to ensure it has sufficient combat power to achieve tactical success against the BCT.



Not drawn to scale

Legend

PAP	People's Armed Police	EW	Electronic Warfare	SHORAD	Short-Range Air Defense
SOF	Special Operations Forces	CP	Command Post	SPAAG	Self-Propelled Antiaircraft Gun

Figure 2: Threat Model for a PLA Army HCAB Defense (Source: T2COM G-2)

Phase 1: Movement Through the HCAB Deep Area (D-7 to H-Hour)

In this phase, the advancing BCT would observe the effects of group army and higher echelon shaping operations focused on collecting intelligence on the BCT, as well as delaying, channeling, and attriting it. Approximately three to four already emplaced group army SOF brigade teams of 12 soldiers each, equipped with small UAS similar to the DJI Matrice and CH-901 loitering munitions, would provide intelligence to the HCAB about the BCT's strength, disposition, and avenues of approach. These SOF teams may also conduct sabotage, raids, and counterreconnaissance against the key systems to disrupt and slow the BCT's advance. The BCT would encounter observed point obstacles at key locations or in channelizing terrain. The BCT would likely need to react to contact from antitank ambushes or attacks on less protected elements of the BCT's formations. The BCT may observe these attacks supported by long-range fires from either ground-based or airborne threats, as well as EW attacks jamming C2 nodes at key times. The PLA would likely give priority to targeting the BCT's C2, ISR, sustainment, and engineering assets during this phase.

As the BCT advanced to within 13 to 20 kilometers of the FLOT, it would increasingly observe 5 to 10 smaller Group 1 and 2 UAS providing intelligence to the HCAB on the BCT's rate and direction of march and engineering reconnaissance assets. Should the HCAB identify a high-value target, the BCT could expect incoming fires from the HCAB's organic fires assets, primarily PHZ-11 rockets, and possibly augmented by group army PHL-03 and PCH-191 multiple rocket launchers.

The BCT would not become decisively engaged in this phase. Group army SOF and HCAB reconnaissance assets would focus on remaining unseen, seeking to initiate contact only on highly favorable terms, then retrograding to maintain operational security. The BCT would also not encounter the HCAB's conventional main line of resistance because the HCAB would seek to obscure its force disposition and obstacle laydown through camouflage, concealment, denial, and deception.

Phase 2: Movement Through the Frontal Blocking Zone (H-Hour to H+4)

As the BCT crosses the FLOT, the HCAB would seek to strip away BCT ISR, prevent the identification of the main battle area, and channel BCT follow-on forces into kill zones. Within roughly 3 to 5 kilometers from the HCAB's main defensive belt, the BCT would experience EW effects as the HCAB conducted signals survey and direct jamming operations against C2 and reconnaissance systems. The BCT's organic and supporting air systems would be challenged by forward-deployed PGZ-07 and PGZ-95 radar-controlled antiaircraft artillery guns, two to four HQ-17 short-range air defense systems, and approximately 10 dispersed HN-6 MANPADS teams. The BCT would likely observe two or three fixed-wing UAS and covering force teams consisting of one to three vehicles performing screening operations. The HCAB would task-organize the covering force teams from platoon- to company-sized elements of mounted and dismounted reconnaissance, including Red Arrow AFT-10 ATGMs, reconnaissance variants of the ZBD-04A IFVs, and ZTZ-96A MBTs. These elements would disrupt the BCT with spoiling attacks and counterreconnaissance efforts, then retrograde to prepared positions within the main defensive belt. They would also use previously emplaced multiple-point and turning obstacles to channel the BCT into preferable terrain where the BCT would come under direct fire, including ATGMs from ground and Z-10 systems, loitering munitions like the CH-901, and indirect fires from PLZ-07 122-mm cannons and PHZ-11 rockets. The BCT would also encounter decoy battle positions, minefields, and other efforts to force the BCT into believing it had entered the main battle area and deploy its assault formations earlier.

Phase 3: Movement Into the Frontier Defense Zone (H+4 to H+8)

As the BCT attempts to identify and establish a point of penetration, it would encounter complex obstacles, antitank and antipersonnel minefields, trenches, mutually supporting positions, and strongpoints designed to channelize BCT forces into direct and indirect fire engagement areas. After fighting through the blocking zone, the BCT would enter the HCAB's main defensive belt defended by the frontier defense group, consisting of two task-organized HCABn. The BCT would observe camouflaged positions, dummy positions, and decoys—inflatable tanks and thermal blankets mimicking vehicle engines—that would deceive, disrupt, and delay the BCT while causing unnecessary munitions expenditure. The BCT's C2, fires, and ISR systems would come under increasing EW attack from both ground- and air-based EW systems, seeking to isolate the breaching force from the main body. The BCT would observe a diverse array of Group 1, 2, and 3 UAS conducting ISR, EW, counter-UAS, and communications relay.

As the BCT prepares to breach, it would come under increasing direct and indirect fire. The PLA would give priority to engineering, obscuration, fires, and C2 assets as high-value targets for organic HCAB 122-mm fires as well as group army and higher echelon cannon, rocket, missile, and air-based fires. In addition, the BCT could expect HCAB and group army fire support to execute counterbattery fires and reseed minefields. Group army Z-10 attack aviation would provide additional airborne direct fire support on advancing BCT formations.

Should the BCT's attack culminate, it can expect an HCAB counterattack consisting of one or two task-organized HCABn (minus) from secondary defensive positions located approximately 10 to 15 kilometers behind the main defensive belt. Group army fires and attack aviation assets would likely provide direct support to the counterattack force to ensure multidomain penetration. The BCT could expect the HCABn to mass combat power and conduct an aggressive, decisive attack on weak or exposed flanks of the BCT. The counterattack would seek to disintegrate remaining BCT forces and force them into retreat or face annihilation.

Phase 4: Depth Defense Zone (H+8 to Change of Mission)

Should the BCT achieve a penetration, it can expect the HCAB to respond aggressively with massed force to attempt to seal that penetration. The BCT may observe the HCAB committing one or two task-organized HCABn (minus) from secondary defensive positions, supported by massed HCAB and group army fires. Depending on the situation, the HCAB may also commit its reserve—generally a task-organized company consisting of MBTs, IFVs, and ATGMs situated behind the secondary defensive positions but along an avenue of approach that maximizes a fast and flexible response.

Should the HCAB commander determine that his defense has culminated, the BCT can expect to see an orderly and decisive withdrawal. The advancing BCT would likely contend with remaining HCAB units conducting alternating retrograde operations and blocking actions supported by residual residual short-range air defense systems such as the HQ-17, PGZ-07, PGZ-95, and HN-6 MANPADS to prevent air attack. The BCT would observe HCAB fires units that are giving priority to counterfire operations to ensure the success of the withdrawal. BCT reconnaissance assets would likely observe the HCAB's remaining service support battalion, operational support battalion, and C2 wheeled and tracked support vehicles retrograding. The BCT would then observe the remaining main combat forces, fires, and air defense systems retrograding. This would leave the BCT to fight through the remaining combat reserve, conducting a rearguard or screening action while the HCAB attempts to rapidly establish a new defensive zone and begin entrenching as quickly as possible.

Implications for the U.S. Army

Operating against an HCAB in LSCO would specifically challenge the BCT's intelligence, fires, and protection warfighting functions because of the PLA's focus on gaining and maintaining information dominance, massed fires, and purpose-built, systems-focused combat effects. U.S. Army training could benefit from the accurate emulation and recognition of high-value PLA combat equipment.

- **Intelligence.** The HCAB's reliance on reconnaissance as part of its information dominance campaign suggests the BCT may need to conduct continuous counterreconnaissance throughout all phases of operations. PLA reconnaissance could be denied if BCTs increase training on disciplined light and emissions control, camouflage, concealment, and deception, as well as adopt more dispersed and mobile operational concepts and robust counter-UAS systems.

- **Fires.** The HCAB's massed fires, supported by robust reconnaissance efforts, would enable a focused and dedicated counterbattery effort. BCT fires could benefit from increased training on rapidly emplacing, firing, and displacing, while simultaneously practicing operations in degraded environments. BCT fires could also examine increasingly dispersed and decentralized firing operations.

- **Protection.** The PLA's approach to systems warfare, manifested at the tactical level as the task organization of theater and group army assets to the HCAB, suggests that BCT protection systems will be challenged by nontraditional fires and effects. These effects could come from air-, sea-, or space-based platforms and would consist of multidomain threat vectors. As a result, BCT protection assets could benefit from increased training in complex and uncertain environments, including disrupted electromagnetic spectrum operations and contending with more lethal and complex kinetic attacks supported by nonkinetic effects.

- **Adversary Equipment Emulation and Recognition.** Accurately emulating PLA combat equipment in training and at Combat Training Centers with opposing forces (OPFOR) may provide the BCT with more realistic training events and better prepare the BCT to gain and maintain situational awareness during LSCO. Additionally, training Soldiers on accurately recognizing and identifying PLA combat equipment could lead to more rapid decisionmaking, responsiveness, and increased lethality.

Appendix A

PLA Attack on a U.S. Army BCT

This table outlines the phases of a PLA heavy combined arms brigade (HCAB) attack against a defending U.S. Army brigade combat team (BCT).

Phase / Timeframe	Observable Indicators	Effects on U.S. BCT	Key PLA Units / Systems
Phase 1: Shaping & Isolation (D-7 to H-Hour)	• 12-soldier special operations forces (SOF) teams insertion • 5 to 10 small UAS (Group 1 and 2) within 15 to 20 km of the frontline • Team- to squad-sized reconnaissance elements	• Group army begin shaping operations • C2, fires, and logistics nodes targeted by SOF and long-range fires • Jamming and direction finding of C2 and ISR systems	• Group army SOF brigade • Group army fires • HCAB electronic warfare (EW) company • Small UAS (DJI Matrice), loitering munitions (CH-901)
Phase 2: Advance & Fixing (H-Hour to H+4)	• 6 to 12 mobile EW systems • Increased first-person view UAS and up to 3 fixed-wing UAS • Artillery and rocket fire • Advance of 2 or 3 battalions with tanks and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) • 2 to 4 antiaircraft guns and approximately 10 MANPADS teams	• Full-spectrum electronic attack degrades C2, ISR, and fires • Counterbattery and suppressive fires on BCT assets • BCT frontline battalions are fixed in their positions	• Frontline attack group (2 or 3 heavy combined arms battalions (HCABn)) • ZTZ-96A main battle tank (MBT), ZBD-04A IFV • PLZ-07 and PHZ-11 122-mm artillery • HQ-17, PGZ-07, and PGZ-95 short-range air defense systems; HN-6 MANPADS; Z-10/Z-19 helicopters
Phase 3: Unfold & Decisive Action (H+4 to H+8)	• Reconnaissance elements appear deeper in the BCT area • 1 or 2 maneuver battalions (30 to 50 vehicles) with engineering equipment move into attack positions	• Continued EW and air defense pressure • Probing attacks disguise the main effort • HCAB reconnaissance identifies BCT reserves and key nodes	• Depth attack group (1 or 2 HCABn) • GSL-133 mine breaching vehicle • GQL-111 bridging system
Phase 4: Initiate (H+8 to H+12)	• Commitment of the main assault group • Massive fire strike from multiple artillery and rocket systems • Engineer platoon begins breaching obstacles under smoke and supporting fire • 9 ATGM carriers in overwatch • 20 to 30 MBTs and IFVs move toward the breach	• BCT elements at the point of penetration are overwhelmed by massed fires • Counterreconnaissance efforts prevent the BCT from seeing the main effort • BCT fires systems targeted by counterbattery fire	• Depth attack group • Group army fires PLZ-05 howitzer, PHL-03 and PCH-191 multiple rocket launchers • Red Arrow AFT-10 ATGM • Thrust maneuver group

Phase / Timeframe	Observable Indicators	Effects on U.S. BCT	Key PLA Units / Systems
Phase 5: Annihilation & Exploitation (H+12 to H+20)	• Main exploitation force (thrust maneuver group) attacks into the BCT rear area • Dedicated reconnaissance assets continue to target BCT units	• BCT forces are encircled, isolated, and destroyed • Aggressive maneuver with brief, violent kinetic and nonkinetic fires • Retrograding or counterattacking BCT units are targeted	• Thrust maneuver group
Phase 6: Continuing Operations (H+20 onward)	• Hasty defense established in the former BCT rear • Reserve force is established • 3 dispersed command posts (3 to 6 vehicles each) • 40 to 60 logistics vehicles and 40 to 60 support vehicles move forward	• PLA consolidates gains and prepares for BCT counterattacks • Hasty rearm, refuel, and repair sites are established • Key nodes (C2, logistics) are protected by fires and EW	• Service support battalion • Operational support battalion

Appendix B

PLA Defense Against a U.S. Army BCT

This table outlines the phases of a PLA heavy combined arms brigade (HCAB) defense against an attacking U.S. Army brigade combat team (BCT).

Phase / Timeframe	Observable Indicators	Effects on U.S. BCT	Key PLA Units / Systems
Phase 1: Deep Area (D-7 to H-Hour)	• Previously emplaced 12-soldier special operations forces (SOF) teams • Point obstacles and antitank ambushes • 5 to 10 small UAS (Group 1 and 2) within 13 to 20 km of the front • Long-range rocket and missile fire on high-value targets	• BCT advance is delayed, channeled, and attrited • Sabotage and raids disrupt C2, ISR, and engineering assets • C2 nodes are jammed at key moments	• Group army SOF brigade • Group army fires (PHZ-11, PHL-03, and PCH-191 multiple rocket launchers) • Small UAS (DJI Matrice), loitering munitions (CH-901)
Phase 2: Frontal Blocking Zone (H-Hour to H+4)	• Forward-deployed antiaircraft guns and MANPADS • 1 to 3 vehicle screening teams with tanks, infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), and ATGMs • Point and turning obstacles • Decoy positions and minefields • Direct and indirect fire from artillery, loitering munitions, and helicopters	• BCT reconnaissance assets are stripped away • Electronic warfare (EW) jamming degrades C2 and reconnaissance • BCT is channeled into kill zones • Deception causes the BCT to deploy its main assault force prematurely	• Covering force teams • ZTZ-96A main battle tank (MBT), ZBD-04A IFV • Red Arrow AFT-10 ATGM • HQ-17, PGZ-07, and PGZ-95 short-range air defense systems; HN-6 MANPADS; Z-10 helicopter
Phase 3: Frontier Defense Zone (H+4 to H+8)	• Complex obstacles, minefields, and trenches • 2 battalions defending the main defensive belt • Camouflage, dummies, and decoys (e.g., inflatable tanks, thermal blankets) • Diverse array of Group 1, 2, and 3 UAS • Heavy direct and indirect fire on breaching force	• BCT is channeled into engagement areas • Deception and decoys waste BCT munitions and time • EW attacks isolate the breaching force • If the BCT attack fails, a decisive counterattack is launched	• Frontier defense group (2 heavy combined arms battalions) • Group army fires Z-10/Z-20 attack helicopter
Phase 4: Depth Defense Zone (H+8 onward)	• If penetrated, 1 or 2 battalions commit to a counterattack • Reserve force (company-sized) may also be committed • Defense fails, an orderly withdrawal is conducted under covering fire • Rear guard units conduct blocking actions	• Any BCT penetration is aggressively sealed off • Withdrawing PLA forces give priority to counterbattery fire to protect their retreat • The HCAB attempts to rapidly establish a new defensive line	• Depth defense group • HCAB reserve

Appendix C

PLA Equipment for Emulation

This table is broken down by category to aid in the development of opposing forces for training.

Category	System/ Equipment Name	Description	Emulation Priority
Armored Vehicles	ZTZ-96A	Main battle tank	High
	ZBD-04A	Infantry fighting vehicle	High
Artillery & Fires	PLZ-07	122-mm self-propelled howitzer	High
	PHZ-11	122-mm self-propelled multiple rocket launcher	High
	PLZ-05	155-mm self-propelled howitzer	Medium
	PHL-03	300-mm multiple rocket launcher	Medium
	PCH-191	Truck-mounted long-range multiple rocket launcher	Medium
UAS	CH-91	Group 3 reconnaissance UAS	High
	CH-901	Group 1 loitering munition / "suicide drone"	High
	DJI Matrice	Group 1 or 2 small reconnaissance UAS	High
	Various UAS	First-person view drones, likely for tactical attacks	High
Antitank	AFT-10 (Red Arrow 10)	ATGM carrier vehicle	High
Air Defense	HQ-17	Self-propelled surface-to-air missile system	High
	PGZ-07	Self-propelled antiaircraft gun	High
	PGZ-95	Self-propelled antiaircraft gun	High
	HN-6	Man-portable air defense systems	High
Aviation	Z-10	Attack helicopter	High
	Z-19	Reconnaissance and attack helicopter	High
	Z-20	Attack and reconnaissance helicopter	High

Category	System/ Equipment Name	Description	Emulation Priority
Engineering	GSL-133	Mine-breaching vehicle	Medium
	GQL-111	Bridging system	Medium
Electronic Warfare	CSZ-181	Electronic warfare vehicle	Critical
	DZ-9001	Vehicle-mounted ELINT system emitter locator	Critical
Deception	Inflatable decoys, thermal blankets	Decoy tanks/vehicles and electro-optical obfuscation	High

Intentionally Left Blank

HTTPS://OE.T2COM.ARMY.MIL