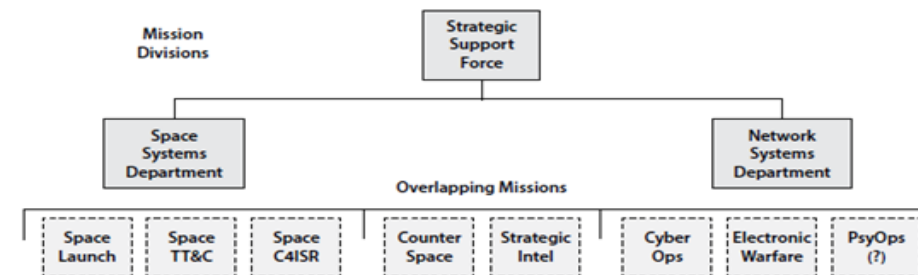
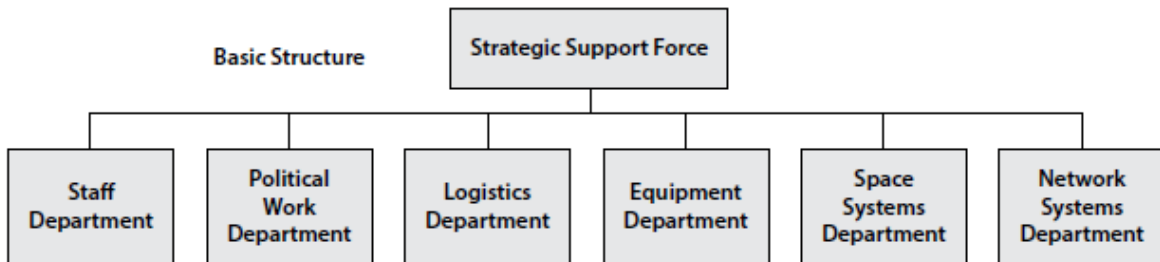


# (U) CHINA'S STRATEGIC SUPPORT FORCE



**(U) This infographic describes the Chinese Strategic Support Force.** In late 2015, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) initiated reforms that have brought dramatic changes to its structure, model of warfighting, and organizational culture, including the creation of a Strategic Support Force (SSF) that centralizes most PLA space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare capabilities. The reforms come at an inflection point as the PLA seeks to pivot from land-based territorial defense to extended power projection to protect Chinese interests in the "strategic frontiers" of space, cyberspace, and the far seas. Understanding the new strategic roles of the SSF is essential to understanding how the PLA plans to fight and win informationized wars and how it will conduct information operations.



Key: PsyOps: psychological operations; TT&C: telemetry, tracking, and control.

- The SSF combines assorted space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare capabilities from across the PLA services and its former General Departments.
- In addition to expected efficiency gains from this approach, the SSF was created to build new synergies between disparate capabilities that enable specific types of strategic information operations (IO) missions expected to be decisive in future wars.
- Despite a lack of transparency and the fact that the SSF is still in transition, a coherent picture has emerged of how the SSF's components fit together and the strategic roles and missions they are intended to fulfill.

The SSF reports to the Central Military Commission (CMC) and oversees two co-equal, semi-independent branches: the Space Systems Department, which leads a space force responsible for space operations, and the Network Systems Department, which leads a cyber force responsible for information operations.

- The Space Systems Department is largely built around elements of the former General Armament Department and now controls nearly every aspect of PLA space operations, including space launch and support; telemetry, tracking, and control; information support; and space warfare. This appears to resolve previous PLA bureaucratic power struggles over responsibility for space missions.



## The SSF has two primary roles: strategic information support and strategic information Operations:

- The SSF's strategic information support role entails centralizing technical intelligence collection and management, providing strategic intelligence support to theater commands, enabling PLA power projection, supporting strategic defense in the space and nuclear domains, and enabling joint operations.
- The SSF's strategic IO role involves the coordinated employment of space, cyber, and electronic warfare to "paralyze the enemy's operational system-of-systems" and "sabotage the enemy's war command system-of-systems" in the initial stages of conflict.
- The SSF improves the PLA's ability to conduct information operations by integrating multiple disciplines of information warfare into a unified force, integrating cyber espionage and offense, unifying information warfare campaign planning and force development, and unifying responsibilities for command and control of information operations.
- The SSF also appears to have incorporated elements of the PLA's psychological and political warfare missions, a result of a subtle yet consequential PLA-wide reorganization of China's political warfare forces. This may portend a more operational role for psychological operations in the future.



- The Network Systems Department is built around the former General Staff Department 3rd Department and incorporates all strategic IO units in the PLA, including those responsible for cyber warfare, electronic warfare, psychological warfare, and technical reconnaissance. This centralization addresses longstanding challenges in operational coordination between the PLA's cyber espionage and cyber attack forces. Below the strategic level, the Network Systems Department shares operational- and tactical-level missions with units under the services and regional theater commands.