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China's ChatGPT War

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"Once technological advances can be used for military purposes and have been used for military purposes, they will immediately almost forcefully, and often against the commander's will, cause changes or even revolutions in warfare." - Friedrich Engels[i]

Earlier this year Microsoft Co-Founder Bill Gates stated ChatGPT, "will change our world" and is "as significant as the invention of the internet"[1] in an interview with German business daily Handelsblatt. In the interview he focused on the way ChatGPT could impact the workplace. Others, however, are looking at how ChatGPT-like programs using Generative AI could impact warfighting. During an online interview in June with the Center for a New American Security, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall stated he has asked his Scientific Advisory Board to "look at the generative AI technologies like ChatGPT and think about the military applications of them".[2] The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has also set up Task Force Lima to leverage the possibilities of integrating AI systems into defense technologies. Secretary Kendall and the DoD are not alone in considering the military applications of ChatGPT. Over the past few months China's People's Liberation Army media has published a multitude of articles on the topic. In one article, written by Retired Major General Hu Xiaofeng (currently Professor at China's National Defense University), he states, "Undoubtedly, the cutting-edge technology of artificial intelligence represented by ChatGPT will inevitably be applied in the military field".[3] In general, there is a consensus in the PLA media that Generative AI has a place in warfare. Seven main areas of application are explored including: human-machine interaction, decision making, network warfare, cognitive domain, logistics, space domain, and training.

While the PLA media express a certain level of inevitability with the application of ChatGPT-like programs in the battlefield there is also not a rush for significant integration into military operations anytime soon. Three major concerns include: building a data set, optimization, and low mutual trust of the technology. In addition, while not mentioned by the PLA media, there is also the issue of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself. A program that

[i] Quote used in Retired Major General Hu Xiaofeng's article "ChatGPT, How Should We View". His use of the quote is in reference to ChatGPT, but of note many Chinese military leaders use this quote for various emerging technologies that can be applied to the battlefield. The message is clear, if technology can be used for war, it will be.

has the potential to speak negatively about the Party will not be allowed, and thus could inhibit the overall efficacy of Generative AI. Overall, China understands the need to be a first mover (or close follower) in Generative AI on the battlefield to "firmly grasp the strategic initiative of intelligent warfare and seize the commanding heights of future military competition"[4], but much like the US military is also cautious about the dangers of integrating the technology too quickly without careful regulation and testing.

Military Application of ChatGPT

MILITARY APPLICATION	DESCRIPTION
Human-Machine Interaction	Bridges the gap between humans and machines
Decision Making	Enhances commanders understanding of the battlefield and possible options for action
Network Offensive and Defensive Warfare	Independently write program codes
Cognitive Domain	Target human mind (both individual and society) , to sow doubts and confusion
Logistics	Maximize entire end to end logistics cycle efficiency
Space Domain	Assist in building space assets / diagnose malfunctions
Training	Help create combat scenarios that reflect "actual combat"

1. Human-Machine Interaction

In the perspective of the PLA media, the most immediate use of Generative AI for the military is the vastly improved human-machine interaction. Generative AI bridges the gap between humans and machines because it can understand both human language and machine language. One PLA author writes Generative AI, "allows machines to 'listen' and understand human language, 'see' human actions and expressions, 'understand' human emotions and intentions, and present the calculation process and results in a way that is easy for humans to understand."[5] This will lead to faster performance of tasks with fewer errors as the ease of utilizing military weapon systems and quickly understanding large amounts of data becomes far more intuitive. In the article, "Looking at the Military Application of Artificial Intelligence from ChatGPT" the authors compare ChatGPT to having a virtual assistant. They write "Generative AI will help analysts carry out data analysis for massive amounts of information on the Internet, so as to improve the efficiency of intelligence analysis and tap potential high-value intelligence."[6] In the example of intel analysts, Generative AI can quickly make sense of and summarize large amounts of data that would otherwise take significantly longer to process. In the future the authors believe enhanced versions of Generative AI, "people, equipment, and

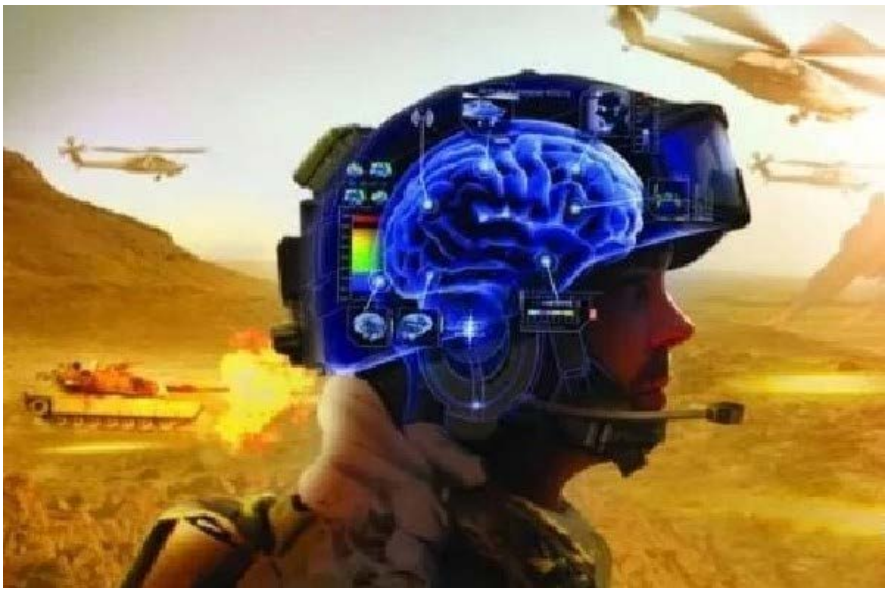
things will be ubiquitously interconnected, and various combat and support entities will be organically integrated".[7] They envision a ChatGPT-like program that is integrated into unmanned combat platforms and more broadly a joint combat system that can accurately plan combat tasks, assign objectives and strike an adversary's target.

2. Decision Making

As NORTHCOM's third Global Information Dominance Experiment (GIDE 3) aimed at "artificial intelligence tools that would give decision-makers earlier, and better, options"[8] concluded in July so too is the PLA, per recent articles, looking to "speed up the research and development of military intelligent decision-making assistance systems"[9]. In the article "Combat + ChatGPT, What Kind of Sparks Will Be Hit" the authors write:

> ChatGPT is expected to be used to accurately analyze the combat requirements put forward by the commander, and generate an action reference plan on this basis, providing a new way and means for the rapid and reasonable allocation of combat forces in future wars, and greatly shortening the combat preparation and implementation cycle.[10]

The idea is that Generative AI will be deeply embedded within the OODA loop where commanders will have real-time information about the enemy's location and actions by quickly collecting and analyzing massive intelligence data from various sources, and provide fast and accurate threat assessment. With this assessment commanders can use Generative AI to analyze and compare combat action plans and select the one they believe is best for their overall strategy. It is also mentioned in another article that Generative AI could help, "boost the autonomy of command and decision-making"[11] which could pose a number of advantages to increase speed and efficiency. A certain level of decentralized command could be achieved where troops who may have had to wait for orders previously could have the ability to act more independently, particularly in a scenario where communication is disabled.



Artist rendering of a future Commander fully integrated with Generative AI technology (xingshizhengce.com)

3. Network Offensive and Defensive Warfare

The US National Security Agency has sounded the alarm on possible weaponization of Generative AI. Cyber Security Director Rob Joyce in an interview with *WIRED* stated, "I don't expect some magical technical capability that is AI-generated that will exploit all the things [but] next year, if we're here talking a similar year in review, I think we'll have a bunch of examples of where it's been weaponized, where it's been used, and where it's succeeded."[12] PLA media agrees with this assessment and is actively discussing the potential application of Generative AI in cyber warfare. In the article "How ChatGPT will Affect the Future of Warfare" the authors delve into the possibility of Generative AI applied to independently write program codes and implement network offensive and defensive warfare. The authors write, "ChatGPT realizes the intersection of arts and sciences, not only can speak, but also can code".[13] Generative AI will be used by hackers to design, write and execute malicious code, build bots and websites to trick users into sharing their information and launch highly targeted social engineering scams and phishing campaigns. Defensively, the authors point out, "ChatGPT can help more people discover potential vulnerabilities, but these vulnerabilities may then be exploited to expand the scope of threats".[14] So a defensive focused cyber expert trying to defend a network may be aware of more vulnerabilities, but, in turn, hackers can also use the information to increase the scope of their threats.

The potential for ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) to be applied in a cyber-attack is no longer hypothetical. There have been various proof of concepts that showcase Generative AI's potential to exploit its capabilities in developing advanced and polymorphic malware.[15] Polymorphic malware is able to mutate continuously to evade endpoint detection and

response (EDR) systems[ii]. Mackenzie Jackson, developer advocate at cybersecurity company GitGuardian, explains, “ChatGPT lowers the bar for hackers, malicious actors that use AI models can be considered the modern 'Script Kiddies”.[16] The possibility, as Mackenzie explains, is a world in which, “AI may end up creating malware that can only be detected by other AI systems for defense”.[17]

4. Cognitive Domain

In many PLA media sources the discussion of the use of Generative AI in the cognitive domain is prevalent. Within the PLA the importance of the cognitive domain is quite high as it is viewed as its own separate domain just like physical domains of air, land, sea, and space[iii]. An emerging trend in the PLA’s thinking on the cognitive domain is the use of technology to enhance their capabilities. In a PLA article titled, “How ChatGPT will Affect the Future of Warfare” the authors write, “ChatGPT will raise the intensity of cognitive warfare to a whole new level”[18]. At the individual level they see the possibility to imitate people and generate nuanced personalized content on various topics on the Internet. For example, a senior government official could be mimicked to a high degree to sow confusion or possibly gain access to sensitive material. At the societal level generative AI can “efficiently generate massive amounts of fake news, fake pictures, and even fake videos to confuse the public”[19]. In the article, “Military Application of Large Model Technology” the authors discuss the desired end effect of the use of Generative AI writing, “destroy the image of the government, change the standpoint of the people, divide society and overthrow the regime”[20]. Generative AI can aptly target the main battlefield of the cognitive domain, the human mind, and play on emotions of fear, anxiety and suspicion to create an atmosphere of insecurity, uncertainty, and mistrust that could sow doubts within decision making at the highest level of command.

5. Logistics

Logistics, a critical component of winning any conflict, can be improved through the use of Generative AI. In various PLA media articles they argue that through Generative AI the entire end to end logistics cycle efficiency can be maximized. In the article, “How Generative AI Can Affect the Future of Warfare" the authors write:

> Generative AI can realize changes in demand perception, resource allocation, and action control, assign tasks, independently plan routes, and autonomously navigate and locate, and deliver the support materials directly and accurately to their assigned destination.[21]

[ii] “Endpoint detection and response (EDR) is a category of security tools that monitor end-user hardware devices across a network for a range of suspicious activities and behavior, reacting automatically to block perceived threats and saving forensics data for further investigation.” To learn more: https://www.csoonline.com/article/3451999/how-edr-stops-hackers-in-their-tracks.html

[iii] To learn more, read. “How China Wins the Cognitive Domain”: https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/Display/Article/3273289/how-china-wins-the-cognitive-domain/

In the article “Combat + ChatGPT, What Kind of Sparks Will Be Hit” the authors echo this sentiment writing that through the analysis of past material procurement the future material demand can be automatically predicted, and at the same time, the budget can be independently made according to market fluctuations, which will maximize economic efficiency. Warehouse management efficiency will be greatly improved as efficiency is maximized and does not rely on centralized PLA management. Furthermore, the best means of delivery can be matched for the materials to be transported, and the optimal transportation plan can be implemented automatically.

6. Space Domain

While the PLA media view Generative AI as having utility in all domains, in the article “Will There Be an Aerospace Version of ChatGPT?” the focus is on space. The authors see potential for Generative AI to improve the process of building space assets as well as the ability to diagnose issues if there are any malfunctions once in orbit. On building space assets, the authors write, “The combination of ChatGPT and aerospace may be like an experienced senior aerospace expert, who can systematically analyze, understand and extract text data, and assist designers in the design of launch vehicles and spacecraft.”[22] In the example of a space launch system, design and development costs can be reduced by using a customized Generative AI application that can pull from all known historical data and help guide the next generation of design. On the improvement of maintenance, the authors cite an artificial intelligence expert from the Research Center of the First Academy of Sciences who states, “We will combine artificial intelligence and information technology to establish a smart health monitoring system for the entire life cycle of the launch vehicle, from rocket design verification, manufacturing, test launch and flight test. "[23] The goal is to improve risk warning and repair assistance in the event of a malfunction.

7. Training

With a lack of real world military experience the PLA must use training and create combat scenarios that come as close to “actual combat” as possible. Traditional combat simulation modeling process usually requires the cooperation of computer experts to implement military concepts, and it is often difficult for military personnel to complete the construction of virtual battlefields independently. The result is long development cycles, long process to make revisions and high costs. However, utilizing Generative AI, as the authors of “Military Application of Large Model Technology”, write, “Military personnel can independently and flexibly, based on the needs of the military, quickly build combat simulation scenarios through simple human language descriptions.”[24] Historical training data combined with newly collected intelligence, technology or other information can be integrated and used to create the most effective simulations possible to prepare for future wars.

PLA's Concerns

While the PLA looks to the potential of Generative AI on the battlefield, they are not under the illusion that it can be utilized in war easily and quickly. In the article, "Generative AI: How Far is it from Comprehensive Application in the Military Field?" the authors look at three main issues: building a data set, optimization, and low mutual trust. First, building an effective military data set requires accurate and precise data. Because China lacks actual combat experience they must rely on "daily training and exercises"[25]. Under Xi Jinping, emphasis on "actual combat" has improved military training, but without real world combat experience the data is severely lacking. Attempts to simulate the Blue Army (adversary) continue to improve,[iv] but major gaps still remain. The greater the amount and quality of data used to train AI, the stronger the AI's capabilities; performance depends entirely on the data.

Second, the data has not been optimized effectively. The authors write, "availability and interpretability of the data are poor" and the data has also not been properly labeled. Moreover, Generative AI needs, "to constantly adjust and optimize its large model parameters through frequent interactions with professional users"[26]. This interaction is time intensive and is not happening at a large enough scale to work in the military field. Moreover, there is a high cost of computing power required for its model training and use also greatly limits its deployment scope. Not mentioned by the PLA media, but compounding the issue of computational power is the restrictions the US has placed that limited the sale in China of chips that can provide the computing power needed to create Generative AI technologies like ChatGPT. Generative AI requires more advanced chips with high levels of networking. Without networking, China's ability to scale up to larger models needed for Generative AI is significantly impaired. However, numerous reports have come out in which China is still able to evade chip controls.[v]

Third, there is the issue of trust in the technology. The authors write, "ChatGPT is still a black-box model, and its internal algorithm logic cannot be decomposed, and it cannot be guaranteed that it will not generate attacks or even harm users".[27] Due to the complexity of the technology and opacity of the information, users cannot clearly understand the causal relationship between input and output, and the results cannot be fully controlled and trusted. AI itself does not understand "what it is doing" and thus does not have an idea of common sense and can even falsify information it states as fact. In another PLA article titled, "A Calm Look at Military Applications of Generative AI" the authors mention the dangers of Generative AI's "uncontrollability" writing about the possibility of malicious attacks from adversaries polluting the data sets relied upon to make the Generative AI effective.[28] Another article titled "Thoughts on ChatGPT" echoes this sentiment by referencing the "Collingridge Dilemma", "Every technological change brings corresponding progress, but it often also brings risks and threats".[29] The article also references the "Frankenstein Complex" in which AI achieves some level of self-

[iv] To learn more read: "China is Building a Blue Army in the Metaverse": https://public.milcyber.org/activities/magazine/articles/2022/baughman-china-blue-army-metaverse

[v] To learn more read: "Chinese Firms Are Evading Chip Controls" https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/21/china-united-states-semiconductor-chips-sanctions-evasion/

awareness with the result of a catastrophic effect. Finally, as one PLA author points out, because ChatGPT adopts a "human-in-the-loop" model training mechanism, it means that the operator can potentially impact future outputs both positively and negatively. The issue is it can be unclear how accurate any given output is given the built in bias of humans interacting with the technology.

The Party Problem

In addition to the concerns the PLA media has expressed, there is also the issue of the Chinese Communist Party itself. While the US has a disinformation problem the CCP has an information problem. It is not the people, but the CCP that defines the truth in China. Over decades of technological advancement the Party has enhanced its sophistication to quash information it deems a threat to their legitimacy. The history of Tiananmen Square Massacre, Uygur genocide and so many other crimes against its own citizens have been erased on Chinese internet and from its history books. One Chinese CEO humorously remarked that China's Large Language Models (LLMs) face severe limitations, to the extent that they are prohibited from counting up to 10 due to the inclusion of the numbers eight and nine. This alludes to the government's sensitivity towards the number 89 and any mention of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.[30] Online descent or protest in China has the potential for severe repercussions and with the expanse of China's Espionage Law even foreigners are not necessarily protected. Generative AI, while having many possible military and broader applications, could also threaten the legitimacy and undermine the interests of the CCP. Perhaps Generative AI, while assessing an issue or problem, responds with an answer that is critical of the CCP. This scenario could certainly prove of grave concern to the Party. To address this issue the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) in partnership with other government bodies, has published "Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services" which went into effect on August 15. Under Article 4 the measures clearly state:

> Adhere to the socialist core values, and must not generate content that incites subversion of State power and overthrowing the socialist system, endangers national security and interests, damages national image, incites secession, undermines national unity and social stability, promotes terrorism, extremism, promotes ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, violence, obscenity, and false and harmful information prohibited by laws and administrative regulations.[31]

If Generative AI must conform to the "truth" the CCP deems as correct certain applications and information provided could be severely tainted or compromised.

Conclusion

The authors of the article "Generative AI: How Far Is It from Comprehensive Application in the Military Field?" sum up the current strategic mindset of PLA media well on ChatGPT-like programs, writing, "It can be seen that whether it is the technical application level or the moral and ethical level, the full application of generative artificial intelligence in the military field seems to be relatively far away."[32] The PLA understands the incredible potential and possible revolution to warfare that technology like ChatGPT has as it continues to advance and improve, but they also see the danger. As Retired General Hu Xiaofeng concludes, humans ultimately must still be in control in future human-machine relationships, to do otherwise is to be an "accomplice of the devil"[33]. Moreover, the PLA must find a way to navigate the restrictions the CCP may place on Generative AI to keep in line with Party standards. The PLA most certainly wants to be the first mover on applying a more comprehensive application of Generative AI on the battlefield, but they will not do so until they can fully trust the technology.

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ENDNOTES

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