DETAILED REPORTS

Tracking the People's Liberation Army (PLA): 26th July - 01st August, 2026

Author: Colonel KK Venkatraman (Retd.) • **Published:** August 07, 2026 • **Source:** Centre for New Age Warfare Studies



EXECUTIVE BRIEF & KEY FINDINGS

Dear Reader,Welcome back to this week's newsletter. The week marked the 99th Anniversary of the PLA. Apart from President Xi Jinping's greetings to all ranks of PLA and Defense Minister Dong Jun's reception, this year saw the award of First-class merit citation to Yang Yong of Unit 91548 for his role as test-pilot of KJ-600 AEW &C aircraft.The major happening during the week was the Politburo announcement to hold the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of CPC in October this year. The Plenum will kick start the electoral process of the 21st Party Congress of the CPC and hence will be keenly watched. The Politburo Study Session focused on the ongoing and future modernisation of PLA. The other major issues covered were RIMPAC-2026, Japanese Defence Minister's call for reassessing nuclear armament and Philippines's deposition of baseline in Scarbourough Schoal with UN. While coverage of RIMPAC-2026 was subdued, coverage of Japan and Philippines was quite vocal, highlighting Chinese sensitivity. PLAN and PLAAF aircraft sorties continued with previous week's trend of helicopters and UAVs flying around Taiwan with a progressive expansion of helicopter sorties to the SE of Taiwan. Going by the size and frequency, it is likely that these are trial sorties meant to refine tactics, techniques and technology for future sorties.Read on.

External Environment

Japan's Rearmament

Japan's rearmament continued to receive attention in Chinese media. Two areas in particular were Japanese Defence Minister's call for an open discussion on nuclear armament and the establishment of National Intelligence Bureau on 31 Jul 2026. Chinese Ministry of National Defense (MND) Spokesperson called Japanese Defense Minister's remarks as "extremely provocative and dangerous" and highlighted that Japan was a 'nuclear-threshold state' with approximately 44.4 tons of plutonium and had the capability to achieve nuclear breakout on short notice. He further called Japan's nuclear redline which should not be crossed. Another article compared the National Intelligence Bureau to the 'Tokko' which existed from 1911 to 1945, and argued that the Bureau will concentrate power with Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi, reduce oversight and checks and balances, and will accelerate military expansion. (PLA Daily. 31 Jul 2026. Page 4. Ministry of National Defense Spokesperson Releases Information and Answers Questions on Recent Military-Related Issues (就近期涉军问题发布消息并答记者问). Japan News. 01 Aug 2026. Japan's National Intelligence Bureau Aims to Boost Information Sharing, End Bureaucratic Silos. PLA Daily. 01 Aug 2026. Page 4. Launch of National Intelligence Bureau: New Evidence of Japan's Military Expansion("国家情报局"出笼，日本扩军备武再添新证))

Japan is the only neighbour along China's Eastern coast with the potential and capability to withstand China, both economically and militarily. Along with Taiwan, Japan anchors the First Island Chain and can restrict Chinese access to the open seas. In addition, Japan is the only Asian country to have defeated and occupied China, memories of which are sustained in public memory in part by the Chinese Government's sustained campaigns. While China's rapid defence modernisation has been the primary cause of Japan's rearmament, China considers its own modernisation as normal and befitting its status, it vehemently protests adjustments/responses by other countries, especially Japan and Taiwan.

Philippines

On 29 Jul 2026, Philippines deposited the Chart showing baselines of Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) with the UN Secretariat, under Article 16 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The deposition of the chart signifies notification of the territorial waters to the international community. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called the claim as a serious violation of China's territorial integrity and international laws and has announced that any infringement or provocative acts on Huangyan Island will invite a strong response.(Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs. 31 Jul 2026. Philippines Deposits Chart of Bajo de Masinloc with United Nations. PLA Daily. 01 Aug 2026. Page 4. Statement by the MFA, PRC on Republic of Philippines' Establishment of so-called "Territorial Sea Baselines" around Chinese Territory of Huangyan Dao (中华人民共和国外交部关于菲律宾共和国在中国领土黄岩岛划设所谓"领海基线"的声明))

RIMPAC-2026

The 30th edition of Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC-2026) was held near the Hawaiian islands from 24 Jun to 31 Jul 2026. Hosted by the US Pacific Fleet, a multinational force of 30 surface ships, 5 submarines, nearly 200 aircraft and more than 30,000 personnel from 30 nations, participated in the exercises. The exercise included anti-submarine warfare, maritime strike, integrated air and missile defense, amphibious operations, and logistics. Representatives from various countries commanded various components. The PLA Daily coverage, highlighted large scale testing of unmanned autonomous systems, validation of advanced manufacturing technologies to sustain logistics, and SINKEX which validated anti-ship capabilities of US and its allies. The article argued that the exercise reflected NATO's

eastward expansion to Asia-Pacific and called on the US not to undermine regional trust and jeopardise regional peace and stability. (US Third Fleet. 04 Aug 2026. RIMPAC 2026 comes to a successful conclusion. PLA Daily. 30 Jul 2026. Page 11. (美国"内湖之梦"阴魂不散))

Politburo Meeting & Collective Study Session

Politburo Meeting

The Politburo of the Communist Party of China met on 30 Jul 2026 and decided to convene the Fifth Plenum* of the Central Committee in Oct this year, to cover the Work Report of the Politburo and deliberate on major issues pertaining to the Party's Self Governance. One paragraph in particular suggests that there are differences within the Party. It highlights the progress of the Party since the 18th Party Congress(when Xi came to power), in strengthening the country and the party. At the same time, it emphasises that the Party faces new challenges, calls on the Party to assess the situation from a strategic perspective of consolidating the Party's position and fulfilling its missions, and continue to address issues in Party building.

会议指出，党的十八大以来，全面从严治党取得伟大成就，开辟了百年大党自我革命新境界，推动党和国家事业取得历史性成就、发

(PLA Daily. 31 Jul 2026. Page 1. Fifth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee to be convened to analyse Current Economic Situation and Economic Work (决定召开二十届五中全会 分析研究当前经济形势和经济工作)

*An excellent brief on Central Committee and the plenums is at China-Briefing.

For reasons unknown, the third plenum, which should have been convened between Sep and Dec of the year following the Party Congress i.e. 2023, was held in Jul 2024 and subsequent plenums were correspondingly delayed. Thus the 20th Central Committee is likely to have only six plenums instead of the usual seven. The Fifth Plenum will also decide on the electoral units and the number of delegates from each electoral unit for the 21st Party Congress, and start the electoral process for elections to the 21st Party Congress, which will convene in Nov 2027. The jockeying for gaining support and placing one's supporters in key positions has already commenced as seen from the number of dismissals and new appointments.

Politburo Study Session

The 27th Politburo Study Session held on 30 Jul 2026 discussed accelerating defence modernisation. Sun Zheng from Office of Strategic Planning of CMC, presented the modernisation of National Defence and made recommendations, which were discussed by the Politburo. President Xi pointed out that PLA modernisation was critical to the overall national plans and in view of global strategic environment. Xi called on the PLA to adhere to the Party's leadership and make combat effectiveness as the aim of modernisation. This would include military application of unmanned technologies and AI, integration of combat capabilities and integration of military and civil sectors. (PLA Daily. 01 Aug 2026. Page 1. Strengthen Political Guidance, Deepen Innovation-Driven Development, and Advance the Modernization of National Defense and the Military with High Quality(强化政治引领 深化创新发展 高质量推进国防和军队现代化) Page 2. General Secretary Xi Jinping Steers the Course for High-Quality Modernization of National Defense and the Military (总书记把舵定向高质量推进国防和军队现代化))

August 01 Celebrations

Award of First Class Merit Citation

On the occasion of PLA's 99th Anniversary, President Xi Jinping awarded First Class Merit Citation to Yang Yong of Unit 91548, for his contribution to National Defense Science and Technology. Unit 91548 is PLAN's Flight Test Unit for Naval Aviation and Carrier-Based Aircraft. Going by CCTV's coverage of Yang Yong, the award has been given for his contribution towards flight testing and validation of KJ-600* Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C) aircraft. (PLA Daily. 01 Aug 2026. Page 1. Commendation awarded to One Individual (给1名个人记功**))**

**KJ-600 is a aircraft carrier borne AEW&C aircraft which has been operationalised onboard the Fujian aircraft carrier. The aircraft will enhance maritime and aerial situation awareness and control over the battlefield. According to a Sohu article, KJ-600 features twin S/UHF band GaN AESA radars in its radome, which can detect airborne targets at 600 kms and surface targets at 200 kms, thus enhancing the carrier's reaction time to 20 minutes. The aircraft shares real time data with other carrier borne fighter aircraft such as J-35 and J-15, enabling them to acquire targets at longer ranges and the J-35 to maintain its stealth. It represents a capability leap over the PLAN's* which provide Early Warning onboard Liaoning and Shandong aircraft carriers.

Role Model of the Times

The week saw the recognition of Senior Colonel Wang Ji from National University of Defense Technology as the 'Role Model of the Times'. He is a pioneer in critical software and co-authored monograph on *High Confidence Software Engineering Technologies.* He enrolled in university at the age of 13 and became a full professor at the age of 33. In 2013, a surgery following a life-threatening medical emergency resulted in amputation of parts of his lower body. Despite this, he led the project on High-security software which won the Military Science and Technology Progress Award in 2025.

Ideological and Political Education

Forging Party Spirit

Fan Weizhou* in his article calls "'forging a strong Party spirit' as the core of '14 persistences' (十四个坚持)** and argues that the success or failure of modernising the PLA is dependent on Party Spirit. The author calls for the elimination of four impurities (四个不纯) - thoughts, political ideology, organisation and work culture, cementing loyalty to the Party, maintaining one's integrity, ideals and convictions, and demonstrating results through one's actions by all ranks so that the Party's goals can be fulfilled. (PLA Daily. 29 Jul 2026. Page 7. Persistently Forge Strong Party Spirit(坚持锤炼坚强党性))

*Likely to be a pseudonym. His articles have appeared since Jan this year.

** 14 persistences were announced by Xi Jinping in his Report of the 19th Party Congress on 18 Oct 2017.

Role of Political Commissars

A PLA Daily article highlights the journey of a Political Commissar in a PLAAF fighter squadron. Listing some of the challenges such as inability to join flying in a single/dual seat fighter aircraft and the difference in seniority between the

pilots and her, this particular political commissar chose to improve personal administration and facilitate pilots to reach a consensus on political and professional issues rather than trying to teach them. Another article highlights how the Political Commissar of an Information Support Force unit has reduced the number, scope and attendance of meetings held so that all ranks actually get time to perform their functions. (PLA Daily. 31 Jul 2026. Page 8. Breaking through the "Cockpit Canopy" (突破那层"座舱盖") 28 Jul 2026. Page 5. Shift in style of meetings stems from a change in perspective on political achievements.(会风之变，变在政绩观))

Combat Theory

Reassessing Methods of Neutralising Command Nodes. He Yang, Xu Kun and Liu Xueyong call for reassessment of neutralising Command Nodes with the introduction of AI. They argue that while AI has enabled distribution of command nodes, their physical, signal, and behavioral characteristics remain the same, enabling their detection. AI can corelate data unique to command nodes to identify them, ensure near simultaneous strikes, and enable their functional disruption across multiple domains. With algorithms being extensively used, they suggest creation and testing fo digital twins of command nodes along with extensive validation and feedback to ensure that own algorithms remain ahead of adversaries. (PLA Daily. 28 Jul 2026. Page 7. Intelligent Means Reshape the Logic of Neutralizing Command Nodes (智能化手段重塑指挥节点击破逻辑))

Undersea Warfare

Shi Guanglei and Shi Haiming from National Defense University, cover how developments in Unmanned Underwater Vessels(UUVs) are reshaping Undersea warfare. They highlight that the combination of critical undersea infrastructure such as submarine cables and oil pipelines, limited coverage of undersea environment and low cost and reduced risk of UUVs has led nations to develop UUVs to gain the initiative in undersea warfare. This includes forthcoming AUKUS UUV and the Russian 'Sarma-D" and nuclear-powered "Poseidon" UUVs. The authors highlight three trends - high risk becoming routine with UUVs, development of distributed seabed sensing networks leading to persistent, wide area situational awareness, and reshaping of naval warfare by manned-unmanned teaming. They foresee future trends of UUVs: as high degree of autonomy capable of independently executing tasks without supervision; underwater swarms capable of conducting wide-area searches, distributed ambushes, and patrolling underwater infrastructure; ultra-long endurance measured in years; and integration of data from air, surface and sub-surface domains, thus creating a multi-dimensional, all-domain maritime combat network. (ST Daily. 31 Jul 2026. Page. 6. Unmanned Warfare Reshapes "Undersea Battlefield"(无人作战重塑"海底战场")

Operations

Taiwan Straits

There were a total of 62 PLA air sorties in the Taiwan Straits during week, including ten helicopter* sorties. Of these, 15 crossed the median line. The largest number of sorties flown was 27 on 30 Jul 2026. The main change from the previous week was the extension in range of helicopter sorties. While last week, helicopter sorties were to the South and South East of Taiwan, this week's sorties were extended further and are more closer to its East. (See location 4 in map below). (Taiwan MND (https://x.com/MoNDefense?))

*The figure does not include combined sorties (fighter, support aircraft, helicopters and UAVs) for which category-wise breakdown is not available.

The limited strength of helicopter sorties (between 1 and 4) and combined helicopter and UAV sortie suggests that these are of exploratory nature. A near-14 hour helicopter sortie (0645 - 2035) will test the limits of endurance of both PLA's equipment and pilots. It is likely that these sorties are flown by the best helicopter pilots, who will create the tactics, techniques and procedures for future sorties as well as work out requirement of additional technology/equipment before these sorties become standard. Further, the PLA is likely to enhance the scale, distance and endurance progressively. The PLA would also need to cater for Search and Rescue Operations to the East of Taiwan in the long run.

本件屬公開資訊
UNCLASSIFIED

中共解放軍進入臺海周邊空域活動示意圖

(PLA air activities in the vicinity of Taiwan)

資料時間：115年7月30日06時至115年7月31日06時
Info. Time: 0600, Jul. 30, 2026 to 0600, Jul. 31, 2026

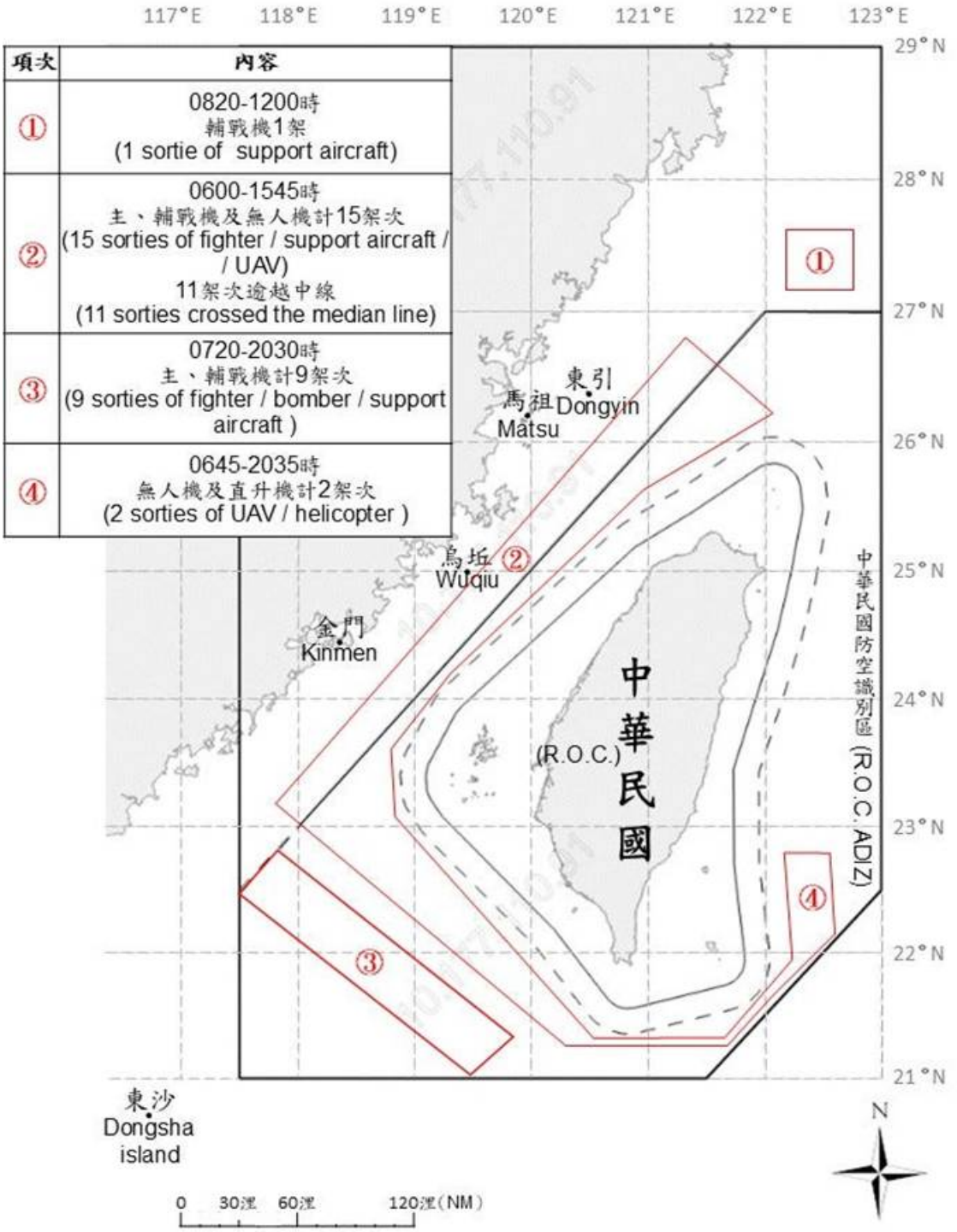


Image Source: Taiwan Ministry of National Defense(https://x.com/MoNDefense?)

Conclusion of Sino-Russian Joint Naval Patrol

The Sino-Russian joint patrol around Japan concluded at Vladivostok on 29 Jul 2026. The Japanese Self Defense Forces Joint Staff in a X Post announced that all four ships crossed the Soya Straits to the West on 27 Jul 2026. Subsequently, it covered the southward movement of the PLAN fleet comprising of Type 55 Destroyer Anshan (Hull No 103), Type 52D destroyer Kaifeng (Hull No 124) and Type 903A comprehensive replenishment ship Kekexilihu (Hull No 903) towards Tsushima Straits on 2/3 Aug 2026. (PLA Daily. 30 Jul 2026. Page 4. Sino-Russian Joint Naval patrol terminated (中俄海军海上联合巡航结束) JSDF Joint Staff (https://x.com/JapanJointStaff?s=20))

Training

Bridging the Gap between Theory/Training and Practice

Three ST Daily* articles highlight how PLA is reducing the gap between Training and Practice. One article highlights the case of College of Joint Operations, National Defence University, which has integrated latest case studies, operational concepts such as unmanned swarm penetration, intelligent minefield blockades, and cognitive suppression attacks, and battlefield data from diverse areas such as Gobi Desert, Tibetan Plateau and islands in South China Sea, into its curriculum for senior commanders of the PLA. Second article highlights the case of Engineering University of JLSF whose cadets visited the to the Zhengzhou Joint Logistics Centre to understand the practical aspects of logistics. The third article highlights the Artillery Academy of PLA Army Services University (陆军兵种大学), which has incorporated Electronic Warfare and UAVs in its wargames. Towards this, the Academy has established a number of platforms such as Artillery Combat Command Simulation Centre and Destruction Laboratory to provide a realistic training environment. (ST Daily. 31 Jul 2026. Page 6. 研究生课堂变成“准战场”) Exploring a New Path for Joint Education and Training Between Academies and Troops (探索“院校+部队”联教联训新路) Extending Instruction to Front Lines of Military Exercises(把教学延伸到部队演训一线) Graduate classroom becomes “quasi-battlefield” (研究生课堂变成“准战场”))

*Science and Technology Daily

Space

In space, the major highlights were the completion of the inorbit upgradation of Beidou Satellite Navigation System and the coverage on ground based seqment of China’s space.

Tianlian-03 Successfully Launched

A Long March-7A carrier rocket successfully launched the Tianlian-3 01 satellite from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on 29 Jul 2026. The satellite will provide data relay, telemetry, and control services for manned spacecraft and observation satellites in MEO and LEO. (ST Daily. 30 Jul 2026. Page 2. Tianlian-3 01 Satellite Successfully Launched (我国成功发射天链三号01星))

Communication Technology Experimental Satellites 27A and 27B Successfully Launched

A Long March-6A rocket launched from Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center on 30 Jul 2026, successfully placed Communication Technology Experimental Satellites 27A and 27B in orbit. The satellites will provide satellite communications, broadcasting, and data transmission services, as well as validation of technical experiments. ST Daily.

31 Jul 2026. Page 2. Communication Technology Experimental Satellites 27A and 27B Successfully Launched (长六改火箭成功发射通信技术试验卫星二十七号A/B星))

In-orbit Upgradation of Beidou Satellite Navigation System Completed

The China Satellite Navigation System Management Office announced the completion of in-orbit upgrade of Beidou Satellite Navigation System. The upgrade which commenced in April, involved changes in PRN* Code, change in operational status of some satellites and change in orbit of one satellite from IGSO to MEO. (Beidou Satellite Navigation System. 08 Apr 2026. China plans to implement in-orbit upgrades of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System. Status Changes for the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System Constellation. 31 Jul 2026.

*Pseudo-Random Noise Code is a unique binary sequence allotted to each satellite, which helps the receiver to identify signals and calculate positions.

Data Network for Ground Support

A ST Daily article highlights the creation of a data network for ground support of space launches by Yang Wen, an engineer at the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre. While the first generation network provided data, it was not integrated. The next generation network provides full site coverage while the current model includes data-driven predictive model for status of equipment. Yang Wen subsequently moved to Wenchang to investigate the failure of Long March-5 in 2017 and two aborted launches of Tianzhou-2 in 2021. (ST Daily. 30 Jul 2026. Page 5. Yang Wen: Weaving a Ground Support Network for Space Launches(杨文：编织航天发射地勤网)

International Cooperation

Visit of PLAN vessels to Brunei

Two PLAN vessels - Training Ship Qi Jiguang (Hull No 83) and Type 71 Landing Ship Kunlunshan (998) completed their visit to Muara Port, Brunei from 24 to 28 July 2026. The ships have a total complement of more than 900 service personnel including cadets of Naval Academy, Dalian and nine foreign naval officers. Apart from providing practical training to cadets, the visit promoted mutual understanding and strengthened bilateral ties. Apart from reciprocal vessel tours, the cadets visited the Defence Academy, Royal Brunei Armed Forces. On completion of the visit, the ships sailed to Surabaya in Indonesia. (Royal Brunei Navy Press Release. 28 Jul 2026. Two ships from PLA Navy conclude successful goodwill visit to Brunei Darussalam).

That is all for this week, folks. See you next week.

Have a great week ahead.