



CHINA'S NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP

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Except for the top post of Chairman, China's military leadership was essentially decided and formally announced before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s 18th Party Congress opened in Beijing on November 8, 2012. The unusually early announcement of key appointments was clearly indicative of Hu Jintao being firmly in charge of the PLA and that his influence will continue.

In addition to appointment of the entire top echelon of the PLA, appointments to the Military Commission's Secretariat, which continues to be an entirely civilian body, were additionally effected. Xi Jinping would have been consulted in the appointments, especially as all but two of the newly appointed officers will serve co-terminus with him. Hu Jintao's decision to relinquish the post of Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) should be viewed in this backdrop, as also in the context of reports emanating from Beijing at least since July 2012, that he had indicated his preference to step down from all posts.

According to an unusual disclosure on November 18, 2012, by the authoritative 'Global Times', a subsidiary of the official Party mouthpiece 'People's Daily', the hand over of the post of Chairman of the Military Commission was completed only on November 15, at an enlarged meeting of Central Military Commission. The 'Global Times' article, again unprecedentedly, heaped fulsome praise on Hu Jintao for voluntarily stepping down and setting a "healthy", new precedent. In confirmation of earlier indications that Hu Jintao and his designated successor were working closely together, China's new supremo, Xi Jinping, declared: "Chairman Hu's important decision fully embodies his profound thinking of the overall development of the Party, country and military. The decision also embodies his exemplary conduct and nobility of character.

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" He pointedly added that Hu Jintao "has pushed China's military development one giant step forward based on achievements made under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, Chairman Deng Xiaoping and Chairman Jiang Zemin." Hu Jintao, in turn, asserted that Xi Jinping was qualified and ready to lead the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Xi Jinping, at the same meeting, took visible charge and laid down his criteria—visible also in the new appointments—for the PLA. He said: "The military must promote and appoint cadres based on their political performance and guarantee that 'guns' are always controlled by reliable people with loyalty to the Party." He ordered the military to 'always put the country's sovereignty and security first, comprehensively improve the military's deterrent power and capability of real combat to protect China's sovereignty, security and development interests at an information-based age'. Allegations of rampant corruption in the PLA found resonance when Xi Jinping pledged to enhance the anti-corruption effort within the armed forces and called on senior military officers to take the lead in obeying rules and regulations for self-discipline.

The main features of China's new Military leadership are clearly the: professional background of all the Members and both Vice Chairmen of the Military Commission; the increased number of 'princelings', or members of the 'Red Nobility' led by the Chairman of the Military Commission Xi Jinping; and the implicit emphasis on Integrated Joint Operations (IJO), especially an enhanced operational role for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force (PLAAF). Additionally, the PLAAF for the first time ever has two representatives in the Military Commission—CMC Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang and PLAAF Commander and concurrent Military Commission Member General Ma Xiaotian. The PLA's representation in the CCP

Central Committee (CC)'s Politburo (PB) remains unchanged at 2, with the presence of General Xu Qiliang and General Fan Changlong. The presence of Xu Qiliang, however, ensures an additional voice for the PLAAF in the Party's second highest body. This can be expected to ensure a more prominent role for the PLAAF, including in IJOs, and enhanced funding. All other members of the CMC are members of the 18th CC.

Almost as if on cue, the official English-language China Daily reported on November 15, 2012, that China has a long-term plan until 2030 to develop advanced aviation engines. US\$1.6 billion has been earmarked for the first phase to fund research and development of engines till 2015. An AVICS official said "During the first phase, which will conclude by the end of 2015 if everything goes well, we will strive to ensure our air force's aircraft be equipped with proper engines and to lift our development capability to that of the developed countries' level in the 1980s". In the second phase China will substantially narrow the technological gap between it and the developed countries and that in the "near future all of the PLA air force's third-generation aircraft use domestically developed engines." "Our ultimate goal is to guarantee that China can develop its own aviation industry without being disrupted or contained by anyone else."

Appointments to key military posts were announced on October 25 and later on November 6, in both cases before even the commencement of the 18th Party Congress on November 8 in Beijing, thus signalling that competing interest groups in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s highest echelons had reached agreement on major personnel issues with regard to the PLA. It additionally conveyed that the matter relating to ousted Politburo member and 'princeling', Bo Xilai, had basically been settled. Xi Jinping's emphasis on the political reliability of PLA officers, however, reveals that suspicions continue to linger in the aftermath of the Bo Xilai episode. Bo Xilai has since been stripped of Party membership and currently awaits trial with reports stating that his mother-in-law, Fan Chengxiu, has hired a couple of lawyers to fight his case.

The announcements implied too, that ongoing investigations of People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel had been completed. Earlier this August while releasing the list of 251 PLA Delegates to the 18th Party Congress, it had been specifically stated that all Delegates had a blemish-free political record. That hinted that while those

closely associated with Bo Xilai, like Generals Liu Yuan and Zhang Haiyang, might not be promoted they would probably neither be punished. The failure to promote General Liu Yuan, who is the son of former Chinese President Liu Shaoqi and is close to Xi Jinping, is significant and indicates that lineage has failed to provide immunity. Interestingly, although a PLA Delegate to the Party Congress, General Liu Yuan failed to attend the opening ceremony of the 18th Party Congress in Beijing on November 8, though he appeared later. Generals Liu Yuan and Zhang Haiyang are both, incidentally, members of the 18th CC.

The PLA has in recent years been trying to upgrade its doctrine, tactics and armaments as also indigenous research and development of weaponry. Emphasis has been given to Integrated Joint Operations (IJO) and transportation of battle-ready armed and fully equipped troops across long distances. There has been repeated mention of the need to prepare for a short 'local war' under 'conditions of informatisation' using overwhelming firepower. This was reiterated in Hu Jintao's Work Report

to the 18th Party Congress. Similarly, the South China Sea will remain an area of active concern where China will continue to establish its dominance. This too found mention in Hu Jintao's Work Report when he emphasized that China would be a maritime power. The recent appointments reveal that China's new military leadership will focus on both these crucial areas.

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The appointment as Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the former Commander of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), Xu Qiliang, was announced on November 6, 2012. A professional aviator and advocate of robust modernization of the PLAAF, Xu Qiliang was born in March 1950. With his appointment the PLAAF now for the first time ever has two representatives in China's highest military body. Xu Qiliang is a 'princeling' and is loyal to Hu Jintao.

The other new Vice Chairman of the CMC is General Fan Changlong, till now Commander of the Jinan Military Region (MR). Born in 1947, he joined the PLA and CCP in 1969. He is the oldest PLA officer to be appointed to the Military Commission and should normally be tipped to retire at the next Congress in 2017.

General Fang Fenghui, who was born in 1951, has been appointed Director of the PLA's General Staff Department (GSD), a post loosely equated with that of Army Chief. A graduate of China's elite National Defense University

(NDU), he is reputed to be a technocrat with command experience including in the digitalized battlefield. More importantly, when Fang Fenghui was appointed Military Region Commander in 2007, he was the youngest officer in the PLA to hold that rank. In a sign of the trust that Hu Jintao reposed in him, Fang Fenghui was the beneficiary of a double promotion when he was appointed Commander of the sensitive Beijing Military Region.

General Fang Fenghui exemplifies the new generation of professionally savvy officers. Apart from his command-and-control skills, he is a much-published author on military strategy, particularly in the areas of computer-aided war games and the synchronization of different branches of the military forces. One of his favourite mottos is that "radically changing times demand innovation in strategic theories." Hu Jintao was said to be very impressed with Fang Fenghui's orchestration of the 2009 military parade in Beijing, which marked the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s founding. Last year, Fang Fenghui won praise when he supervised complicated large-scale maneuvers involving more than 30,000 soldiers from the Beijing, Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs.

The appointment of General Zhang Youxia, born in July 1950, as Director of the General Armaments Department (GAD), is another that points to an officer's professional background being a factor in his selection for higher office. Long a proponent of modernization of the PLA's weaponry, Zhang Youxia has now been empowered to implement suitable policies. In 2009, General Zhang Youxia was quoted in the Party newspaper 'People's Daily' as saying: "The fires of war are burning throughout the world. In this area the gap between the Chinese military and foreign militaries is growing day by day. This is a real problem." As GAD Director, General Zhang Youxia will now supervise overseas procurement and armaments research.

He is also the only officer in the Central Military Commission with combat experience. He participated in the Laoshan battles of the 1979 Sino-Vietnam border war as Commander of the 119 Regt, 40th Division, when he was wounded. General Zhang Youxia is the son of General Zhang Zongxun, regarded as one of the 'Ten Anti-Japan Generals' of the CCP and a 'princeling'. He is loyal to Hu Jintao, but also close to Xi Jinping.

Born in 1947, General Zhao Keshi, the new Director of the General Logistics Department (GLD), owes his promotion to Hu Jintao. The oldest among the Generals appointed to the top posts recently, he joined the PLA in 1968 and the

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) a year later. General Zhao Keshi was also only a Chief of Staff when he was picked by Hu Jintao in 2007, and appointed Commander of the Nanjing Military Region, thereby benefiting from a double promotion.

Born in 1951, General Zhang Yang, the new Director of the powerful General Political Department (GPD) is the dark horse candidate and he was apparently appointed at Hu Jintao's behest. He was earlier Political Commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region. Zhang Yang was an old "partner" of Fang Fenghui in the Guangzhou Military Region. When Fang Fenghui served as the Chief of Staff in Guangzhou from 2003-2007, Zhang Yang was Director of the Military Region's Political Affairs Department from 2004-2007. General Zhang Yang joined the PLA in 1968 and the CCP a year later in 1969. He was a member of the 17th CCP CC. To an extent, his appointment as Director of the powerful GPD increases General Fang Fenghui's authority in the PLA and is in line with the criteria spelt out recently by Xi Jinping for evaluating PLA officers. Interestingly, reports circulating in Beijing last week suggested some discussion among military officials of the need for a Joint Chief of Staff.

The South China Sea will be an area of active interest for the new military leadership is clear from the pronouncements of at least two of the recently appointed top officials. General Zhang Youxia, in the initial stages itself adopted a tough line against the Philippines in the dispute over Scarborough Reef.

Born in August 1949, General Ma Xiaotian, the new PLAAF Commander, joined the PLA in 1965

and the CCP in 1969. Reputedly a flamboyant and proficient fighter pilot, while a 49-year-old pilot in 1998, he flew a Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jet in front of a domestic and foreign crowd at the Zhuhai International Air Show. Ma Xiaotian did very well in his course at the NDU. He has been a member of the 16th and 17th CCs. Known to be an outspoken officer with hawkish views on China's territorial disputes in the East and South China seas, he has handled the Intelligence and Foreign Affairs portfolios of the PLA as Deputy Chief of PLA General Staff for 5 years. He has experience of Tibet while in the Lanzhou MR. He succeeded Xu Qiliang as the PLA's Deputy Chief of General Staff in 2007 when Xu Qiliang was made Commander of the PLAAF and has now again inherited Xu Qiliang's post.

Born into a military family, Ma Xiaotian's father, Ma Zaixiao and father-in-law, Zhang Shaohua, were both founding Senior Colonels of the PRC. Ma Zaixiao oversaw the PLA's ideological training base in Beijing for senior cadres. Ma Xiaotian, who aspired as a child to join the PLA, joined the PLAAF one month before his 16th birthday and was a military pilot for six years. He was one of the youngest in the PLA.

In May 2012, when China and the Philippines were locked in a stand-off over the South China Sea's Scarborough Shoal, Ma Xiaotian told the Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV "the South China Sea issue is none of the United States' business; it's just [territorial] disputes between China and its neighbouring countries". He added that "the PLA is able to protect China's maritime territories", but "at the moment China is not preparing to resort to military means - that would be the very last option".

At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in 2010, Ma Xiaotian told US Pacific Commander, Admiral Robert Willard, that China would not accept any surveillance by US ships and planes in the South and East China seas, and that Washington's arms sales to Taiwan were "creating obstacles" for Sino-US military-to-military exchanges. He reiterated concerns about cold-war-era alliances and called for more equal, trusting relationships.

Most predictable was the direct elevation of 1954-born General Wei Fenghe as Commander of the Second Artillery, or China's strategic missile force. Wei Fenghe served as chief of staff of the Second Artillery from 2006-10 and was involved in the intercontinental ballistic missile testing in 1989. He is a professional soldier and has spent his entire career with the Second Artillery. He joined the PLA and CCP in 1970 and was an alternate member of the 17th CC.

Admiral Wu Shengli, PLA Navy (PLAN) Commander born in August 1945, lost out in the latest round of promotions, but has been retained as PLAN Commander. Wu Shengli is the son of Wu Xian, a former Vice Governor of Zhejiang Province, and a 'princeling'. While there are reports of his proximity to Xu Caihou who just retired as CMC Vice Chairman, Wu Shengli is known to have been loyal to Hu Jintao. His age could have been a probable reason for his

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not being promoted as he is already near the normal retirement age of 68 years. Another consideration would have been the difficulty in appointing two representatives from services other than the PLA's ground forces to the position of Vice Chairman of

the Military Commission. Wu Shengli finally did not make the cut despite his proximity to Hu Jintao and there is a possibility a new PLAN Commander could be appointed by 2014.

Finally, General Chang Wanquan continues to be officially listed as a Member of the Military Commission indicating that he will probably be China's new Defence Minister. Formerly the Director of the PLA's GAD when he also oversaw China's space programme, 1949-born General Chang Wanquan will benefit from the lateral shift as Defence Minister.

These appointments bear Hu Jintao's imprimatur indicating that his influence will linger.

That the South China Sea will be an area of active interest for the new military leadership is clear from the pronouncements of at least two of the recently appointed top officials. General Zhang Youxia, in the initial stages itself adopted a tough line against the Philippines in the dispute over Scarborough Reef. Similarly, the new PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Commander General Ma Xiaotian, has made unequivocal pronouncements on the subject. Interestingly both, Zhang Youxia and Ma Xiaotian, are 'princelings'. Xi Jinping and Xu Qiliang are the other two 'princelings' in the CMC.

Military modernization will remain fast-paced with special attention to development of high-tech indigenous Defence R&D, 'informatisation', the PLAAF, PLAN and Second Artillery. There will be less flexibility and a reluctance to agree to concessions on issues of sovereignty or territorial disputes. Pressure on Japan and India could increase.



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