



In This Special Report:

NEW CMC VICE CHAIRMEN STRONG ADVOCATES FOR JOINT, MODERN MILITARY
By Oriana Skylar Mastro, Michael S. Chase and Benjamin S. Purser, III.....2

PARSING THE SELECTION OF CHINA'S NEW HIGH COMMAND
By Daniel Tobin, Kim Fassler and Justin Godby.....5

PROFESSIONALISM AND FACTIONALISM IN THE PLA LEADERSHIP SELECTION
By Willy Lam.....9

HU JINTAO'S DOUBTFUL FUTURE ON THE CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION
By Peter Mattis.....12

ASSESSING THE PLA'S PROMOTION LADDER TO CMC MEMBER BASED ON GRADES VS. RANKS - PART 1
By Kenneth W. Allen.....14

ASSESSING THE PLA'S PROMOTION LADDER TO CMC MEMBER BASED ON GRADES VS. RANKS - PART 2
By Kenneth W. Allen.....17



General Xu Qiliang, New Central Military Commission Vice Chairman

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A Guide to China's New Military Leadership

On November 15, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership announced the final member of the new Central Military Commission: CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping. Outgoing President Hu Jintao broke with past precedent by not retaining the Central Military Commission (CMC) chairmanship for two years after stepping down from other leadership posts. Arguably, China just underwent its smoothest and clearest transition to a new leadership. That a historic precedent has been set in 2012 serves as a reminder that China's leaders have now passed beyond Deng Xiaoping's shadow, placing China watchers in uncharted territory.

Below is a selection of four *China Brief* articles assessing this year's military leadership transition. These four articles represent the timeliest and most comprehensive review of the leadership changes within the People's Liberation Army (PLA) currently available.

Additionally, we highlight a two-part series from 2010 by long-time PLA watcher and *China Brief* contributor Kenneth W. Allen on using PLA rank and grade as a tool for analyzing promotion patterns, especially at the CMC level. Allen's exemplary work on the PLA—particularly his unerring attention to detail and how the PLA organizes itself—has had a lasting influence on the China field and warrants mention here.

The CCP Central Military Commission Membership (November 2012)

Chairman Xi Jinping

CCP General Secretary

Vice Chairman General Fan Changlong

Former Commander of the Jinan Military Region

Vice Chairman Air Force General Xu Qiliang

Former Commander of the PLA Air Force

General Chang Wanquan

Minister of National Defense

General Zhang Youxia

Director of the General Armament Department

General Fang Fenghui

Director of the General Staff Department

General Zhang Yang

Director of the General Political Department

General Zhao Keshi

Director of the General Logistics Department

Air Force General Ma Xiaotian

Commander of the PLA Air Force

Admiral Wu Shengli

Commander of the PLA Navy

General Wei Fenghe

Commander of the Second Artillery

New CMC Vice Chairmen Strong Advocates for Joint, Modern Chinese Military

By Oriana Skylar Mastro, Michael S. Chase and Benjamin S. Purser, III

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As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) underwent its once-a-decade leadership transition at the 18th Party Congress this week, it also made a series of major changes to the top echelon of its military leadership. This turnover among the top brass included the elevation of new People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and Second Artillery commanders, heads of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) powerful four general departments (General Staff, General Political, General Logistics and General Armaments) and a corresponding membership turnover in the Central Military Commission (CMC)—the powerful Party body that controls China's rapidly modernizing armed forces. Among the most important changes was the promotion last week of two senior officers—former Jinan Military Region (MR) Commander General Fan Changlong and former PLAAF Commander General Xu Qiliang—to serve as the new military vice chairmen of the CMC (Xinhua, November 4). As China's highest-ranking military officers, Generals Fan and Xu will be responsible for key aspects of the direction of PLA modernization, including China's quest to enhance the military's "jointness."

An artilleryman by training, General Fan Changlong, age 65, has served in the PLA since 1969 when he joined at age 22. Fan initially served in the Shenyang MR's 16th Corps' artillery regiment for three years as an enlisted soldier and then fourteen years as a staff officer [1]. From 1985 to 1990, he served in the 16th Group Army (GA), consecutively, as the 48th Division chief of staff, 16th GA chief of staff and, finally, as the GA commander (Xinhua, November 4). With four armored divisions and multiple brigades, the 16th GA is one of the Shenyang MR's largest elements. After leading the 16th GA for five years, Fan was promoted to major general and, five years after that, was promoted to chief of staff for the Shenyang MR, in 2000. In 2002, he was promoted to lieutenant general and then appointed as one of the

assistants to the chief of the PLA general staff in 2003. The following year, he became the commander of the Jinan MR—a position he held until his recent elevation to the CMC.

As Jinan MR commander, he successfully oversaw years of major, international exercises: Sino-Russian Peace Mission 2005, Queshan 2007, Iron Fist 2009 and Vanguard 2011 (*Ta Kung Pao*, November 5). Under Fan's leadership—and in response to personal tasking from Hu Jintao—the Jinan MR effectively carried out a pilot project for reforming the largest joint logistics system in the PLA. Fan thus developed an unparalleled track record for planning and executing advanced, joint logistics. He proved that ability in 2008 when he led a major contingent of the forces that responded to the massive Sichuan earthquake as part of Jinan MR's mission of emergency management (*South China Morning Post*, October 22). Such successes supplemented Fan's service as the general with the most time leading an MR and help explain his completely unprecedented promotion from MR commander directly to CMC vice chair without having had to serve on the CMC as a regular member first (*Ta Kung Pao*, November 5).

General Xu Qiliang is the first Air Force general in the history of the People's Republic of China to be appointed a vice chairman of the CMC, a body traditionally dominated by the ground forces. Xu, who was born in 1950, joined the PLAAF in 1967 and graduated from the 8th Aviation School in 1969 as a fighter pilot. At age 34, he became the youngest corps deputy commander (corps deputy leader grade) of the PLA in 1984 and then, as the commander of the 8th Air Corps in Fuzhou, became the youngest corps commander (corps leader grade) at age 40 in 1990. He served the commander of the Shenyang Military Region Air Force (MRAF) and as a concurrent MR deputy commander (MR deputy leader grade) before becoming one of the deputy chiefs of the general staff (MR leader grade) in 2004 and then commander of the PLAAF (MR leader grade), which he held from 2007 to 2012 [2]. Over the past 40 years, Xu has built for himself an impeccable military record that culminated in receiving his three-star rank in July 2007 and becoming a CMC member (CMC member grade) in October of that year (*Xinhua*, November 4). Given the expected retirement age of 70, Xu and Fan probably will complete their service as vice chairmen to Xi Jinping at the 19th

Party Congress in 2017.

Fan's promotion was a surprise to some observers as he skipped the CMC member grade, but Xu's appointment is probably more significant for two reasons. First, General Xu is widely known for his strong advocacy of air and space power, suggesting the promotion could enable Xu to realize his vision of a more modern and capable PLAAF. As PLAAF commander, Xu presided over a period of transition from a traditional focus on air defense to a broader outlook encompassing more integrated offensive and defensive operations and emphasizing the increasing role of space power. Xu has stated the PLAAF must forge "a sharp sword and shield capable of winning peace" to help protect China's interests (*PLA Daily*, November 1, 2009). This includes not only more modern combat aircraft like the J-20 stealth aircraft China unveiled in January 2011 and a second stealth fighter that is now undergoing flight testing, but also advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), early warning, air defense and strategic airlift capabilities (*Wall Street Journal*, November 3) [3].

If Xu's controversial comments about the inevitability of greater military competition in space are any indication, China's sword and shield also encompasses anti-satellite and other space control capabilities as well as the objective of ensuring China's own ability to use space for military purposes and limit or deny an adversary's ability to do likewise. As Xu stated in a November 2009 interview:

"The air and space era and information era have arrived at the same time, and the domain of information and domain of space and air have become the new commanding height for international strategic competition. Considering the global trend of a new revolution in military affairs, competition among armed forces is moving toward the air and space domain and is extending from the aviation domain to near space and even deep space. Such a 'shift' represents an irresistible trend, such an 'expansion' is historically inevitable, and such development is irreversible. In a certain sense, having control of air and space means having control of the ground, oceans, and the electromagnetic space, which also means having the strategic initiative in one's hands" (*PLA Daily*, November 1, 2009).

Moreover, Xu's advocacy for the PLAAF's role in space operations probably reflects internal competition over which part of the PLA will have primary responsibility for an increasingly critical mission—one that Chinese strategists see as potentially decisive in future wars. Second, Xu is the first Air Force general to be appointed a vice chairman of the CMC, a body traditionally dominant by the PLA's ground force officers. Xu's promotion could thus reflect a growing desire in the military to pursue western-style joint operations and perhaps greater strategic relevance and influence for the PLAAF, PLA Navy (PLAN) and Second Artillery.

General Xu's appointment as a CMC vice chair in particular reflects a broader trend toward greater representation for non-ground force services at the top. Since 2004, more PLAAF, PLAN and Second Artillery officers have served in important military leadership posts than ever before. These have included the Academy of Military Science (AMS) and National Defense University (NDU) commandants and the NDU political commissar. This is the result of China's longstanding efforts to promote the PLA's joint operations capabilities—a challenging endeavor in what has historically been a highly ground force-centric military establishment. Indeed, as of this party congress, there are no PLAAF deputies in any of the General Departments, highlighting that this is a work in progress. Nonetheless, given Xu's background, many predict that PLAAF interests will be better represented than in the past, especially because Xu is not the only air force officer on the CMC. As the new PLAAF commander, General Ma Xiaotian also will be on the CMC to promote the vision and interests of the air force. The fact that two air force officers have secured a place on China's highest military body along with the rising fortunes of the PLAN and Second Artillery probably foreshadows the loosening of the ground force's sixty-year-long grip on the levers of military power.

Nonetheless, a true equalization of power and influence among the ground forces, PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery necessary to conduct Western-style joint operations is still a distant possibility. First, as a CMC vice chairman, Xu is not in a position to advocate for the PLAAF in the same way he did when he served as PLAAF commander. At the top of the system, service parochialism is supposed to be mitigated by party identity and the need to represent the interests of all parts of the

armed forces. Presumably, in his new role, General Xu would not want to be perceived as favoring his service at the expense of the rest of the PLA.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, the ground forces still dominate the system in some important respects. The ground forces' dominance is shown not only by their leadership of the four general departments—which is a function of the fact that the four general departments serve as the ground forces' headquarters more than as a joint headquarters—but also by the structure of the PLA itself. Only ground force officers have commanded the PLA's powerful, geographically-based MRs, even in the Nanjing and Guangzhou MRs that focus on conflict scenarios involving possible sea and air fights over Taiwan and in the East and South China Seas. Accordingly, major organizational changes would likely be required if the PLA were making a stronger push toward complete jointness, consistent with what an important article marking the PLA's 85th anniversary described as the objective of promoting the transition from “coordinated joint operations with one service as the main force to integrated joint operations of multiple services and arms” (*PLA Daily*, July 30).

Three indicators in the form of organizational changes would signal a changing tide toward greater jointness. First, China would move to restructure or replace the MRs with theater commands (warzones) to simplify command structures for daily peacetime training as well as wartime operations. For example, a cross-strait conflict with Taiwan primarily would involve the Nanjing and Guangzhou MRs, which means the ground force, PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery would not only need to integrate command vertically but also coordinate horizontally across the MRs, potentially reducing real-time combat readiness. Second, China could start rotating officers from PLAAF, PLAN, Second Artillery as well as the ground forces through the top positions of the four general departments. Lastly, to ensure the ground forces are on equal standing with the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery, the Chinese could create a PLA ground forces headquarters on par with PLAAF, PLAN and Second Artillery Headquarters and even upgrade the Second Artillery to a service instead of its current status as an independent branch.

The restructuring or replacement of the MR system has been rumored off and on in recent years, but thus far has failed to materialize. The creation of a separate army headquarters and elevation of non-ground force officers to head the four general departments would be major developments as well. Should this come to pass, it would not only symbolize that the ground force is the peer of the other services but also would indicate that the four general departments no longer play the role of ground force headquarters, but rather would function as a real joint staff organization. Bureaucratic interests and organizational culture, however, are likely to remain formidable obstacles to such major organizational changes, suggesting the PLA will continue to face challenges to its ability to effectively conduct joint operations despite important changes at the top of the command system.

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Notes:

1. Online Chinese wikis provide some of the sourcing for tracking Fan and Xu's careers, including <http://baike.baidu.com> and <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki>.
2. You Ji, "Meeting the Challenge of the Upcoming PLAAF Leadership Reshuffle," in Richard P. Hallion, Roger Cliff, and Philip C. Saunders, eds., *The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities*, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2012, pp. 216–218.
3. For a comprehensive analysis, see, Hallion et al, eds., *The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities*, available online at <http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/books/chinese-air-force.pdf>.

Parsing the Selection of China's New High Command

By Daniel Tobin, Kim Fassler and Justin Godby

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In choosing the ten uniformed officers who make up China's new Central Military Commission (CMC)—seven new appointments and three incumbents, two of whom have moved to more senior positions—Beijing has charted a decidedly middle course. It is crucial to examine not only how the new lineup's career experiences differ or resemble their predecessors, but also the implications of the alternative selections that did not occur. Given both the pool of candidates technically eligible and rumors in the Hong Kong and international press over the past two years about the identity of the leading candidates, Beijing chose against several scenarios that would have had different implications for the future of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The slates of outgoing and newly appointed CMC members share some common characteristics. Like their predecessors, the majority of the new CMC have held operational commands at the forefront of the PLA's efforts to train for high-tech war. Several probably caught the attention of senior military and civilian leaders while serving in high-profile roles in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief efforts, which increasingly serve as proxies for combat experience [1]. Some fought in China's brief clashes with Vietnam in 1979 and/or the 1980s. With the revival of professional military education (PME) in the 1980s after the Cultural Revolution, almost all have received PME and in some cases held senior positions at PME institutions.

There, however, are differences. China's new CMC lineup has slightly greater diversity of experience across China's seven military regions than the outgoing group, who were appointed between 1999 and 2007. Significantly, with former PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Commander Xu Qiliang's promotion to a CMC vice chairman—the highest position held by an air force officer in the post-Mao era—and his replacement with another PLAAF officer, non-ground force officers now hold four of the ten uniformed seats on the CMC.

Nevertheless, the new lineup as a whole suggests incremental rather than wholesale change. Though this is not startling, it is interesting that Beijing did not opt for one of several other scenarios debated by PLA watchers over the past two years. One possibility included non-ground force officers making up half of the new CMC and two out of the three most senior uniformed positions [2]. Such a scenario, if combined, with the appointment of reform-minded ground force officers, might have generated momentum to reform the PLA's ground-centric command structure. At the other end of a spectrum, one "wild card scenario"—embodied in some purported CMC lineups circulating on the Chinese-language Internet earlier this year—was a highly political CMC, packed with political commissars. Such a CMC might have been focused narrowly on preserving party rule in the face of concerns about political stability in the wake of the Arab Spring, fears of a slowing economy and several high-level political scandals over the past year, including the fall of Politburo member Bo Xilai. In such a scenario, Xu Qiliang might have been passed over for a vice chairman position in favor of a career political officer.

There were, however, a few surprises even in the middle-of-the-road outcome that materialized. One was the new CMC lineup's early emergence on November 4—with the appointment of two new CMC vice chairmen at the final meeting (or "plenum") of the outgoing 17th Central Committee rather than the 1st Plenum of the 18th Central Committee on November 15. Another was Beijing's selection of Jinan Military Region (MR) Commander Fan Changlong, age 65, as the senior uniformed vice chairman over General Armament Department (GAD) Director Chang Wanquan, age 63. Chang had long been expected to become vice chairman, and his promotion would have followed the pattern of only elevating existing CMC members to that body's top posts. Instead, Fan not only leapt over Chang, but also skipped a military grade, which is extremely rare [3]. Fan is eminently qualified, having served in senior positions in two MRs and in the General Staff Department (GSD) in Beijing. Though preparations began before his tenure, since 2004, the Jinan MR he led has conducted crucial experiments in joint logistics, command structures and training methods (*PLA Daily*, December 16, 2008; November 11, 2008). Fan will be past the mandatory retirement age at the next party congress and is therefore likely to serve only one

five-year term.

PLAAF Commander Xu Qiliang's elevation to vice chairman expands the number of service officers on the CMC from three to four of ten uniformed members. Xu, a former fighter pilot, who has served in two military regions, as chief of staff of the PLAAF, and commander of the Shenyang MR's air force, also served as a deputy chief of the GSD. Already a PLAAF deputy chief of staff in the early 1990s, General Xu has witnessed firsthand his service's extraordinary transformation in the subsequent two decades from a poorly-trained, technologically-backward service into an air force with the world's third highest number of advanced, fourth-generation fighters [5]. His appointment as a CMC vice chairman testifies to the increasing prominence of the missions of the services at the expense of the traditionally dominant ground force. Nevertheless, Beijing also unexpectedly retained PLAN Commander Wu Shengli in his post rather than promoting him to a more senior CMC position. Observers had tapped Wu to become Minister of National Defense or even a vice chairman. The new lineup is therefore less "joint" than it might have been if Wu also had ascended and another naval officer replaced him as PLAN commander as many speculated, bringing the total number of service officers to five of ten uniformed CMC members.

Wu had seemed a natural fit for Minister of National Defense owing to his considerable foreign engagement experience as PLAN commander (*South China Morning Post*, October 20). The defense minister is the PLA's third-most senior uniformed officer and manages its relationship with China's state bureaucracies and foreign militaries, though he holds no operational control of forces in the field [6]. As the PLA moves incrementally in the direction of a more "joint" force, naming a navy officer defense minister also would have been a less radical departure from precedent than if Wu had been promoted to head, for example, one of the four general departments.

Instead, Chang Wanquan will become defense minister at the National People's Congress in the spring. Chang may have received the defense minister post as a consolation prize, crowding out Wu's promotion. There is a remote chance, however, that Chang's new position represents an effort to make use of his experience leading the

GAD, which has primary responsibility for weapons design, development, procurement and maintenance and manages China's space and nuclear weapons programs. Outgoing President Hu Jintao made "civil-military integration," particularly in the defense industrial sector, a high priority ("Civil-Military Integration Theme Marks PLA Day Coverage," *China Brief*, August 12, 2011; *Qiushi*, August 1, 2011). China's defense minister appears to be a senior CMC official who works with staff in different offices throughout the PLA's four general departments, but the current setup for the Ministry of National Defense lacks the bureaucratic presence of the 1950s-era, Soviet-style Chinese defense ministry that had additional responsibilities over the defense industry. If those responsibilities are returned, Chang's experience would be invaluable.

The two new service chiefs appointed to the CMC, Ma Xiaotian, age 63, as PLAAF commander, and Wei Fenghe, age 58, as commander of the Second Artillery, both had been serving as deputy chiefs of the GSD. These positions gave them experience managing issues for the entire PLA and positioned them in the right grade for promotion to the CMC, whose membership since 2004 has included the heads of the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery. Wei, who previously served as chief of staff of the Second Artillery and commanded one of the Second Artillery's bases—a career path very similar to his predecessor Jing Zhiyuan—is young enough to serve two five-year terms. General Ma, who at one point competed with Xu Qiliang to lead the PLAAF (both were appointed full members of the Central Committee when only deputy MR-leader grade officers in 2002), is only eligible for one term. His resume, however, exemplifies the diversity of command, staff and higher education experiences the PLA seeks for its senior officers. Ma served in two MRs and was the first air force officer to head the National Defense University before becoming the deputy chief of the GSD in charge of foreign affairs and intelligence (*China Leadership Monitor*, No. 24, November 11, 2007).

One other important observation is that Beijing did not feel the need to follow the precedent of having one operational track officer and one political track officer fill the CMC's number one and number two uniformed positions, respectively [7]. With the exception of 2002–2004, since the early 1990s, one of the CMC's uniformed vice chairs has been a career political officer. Chinese

leaders evidently did not think departing from this trend was destabilizing enough to hold back Xu Qiliang's appointment as a vice chairman.

Heightened concerns about political reliability, however, may have played out in other appointments. The only new career political officer named to the CMC is the former Guangzhou MR Political Commissar Zhang Yang, age 61, as director of the General Political Department (GPD). Zhang's youth makes him eligible for two terms, and he hails from an increasingly important military region with responsibilities for possible contingencies in Taiwan, the South China Sea and China's land border with Vietnam. His most important characteristic, however, may have been his quiet contrast to several of the outspoken generals most familiar to PLA watchers, especially those associated with particular policy positions or with cross-cutting family ties to civilian elites, who were not appointed to the CMC.

Three military "princelings" (or children of former high-level officials) all surnamed Liu (no relation among them), for example, who were widely rumored in the international press to be contenders for the CMC, will instead remain in their posts [8]. Liu Yuan, political commissar of the General Logistics Department (GLD) and son of former President Liu Shaoqi, delivered an unusually blunt anti-corruption speech in January and then toppled a GLD deputy director (*Sydney Morning Herald*, November 10; *South China Morning Post*, February 1). This may have given other senior military leaders pause about their security should Liu be appointed to higher office. He also had penned the introduction to a prominent public intellectual's book advocating a particular domestic reform direction (*Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2011). More explicitly, Liu Yazhou, political commissar of the National Defense University and son-in-law of former President Li Xiannian, has advocated openly for democratization and other controversial positions (*Want China Times*, August 1; *South China Morning Post*, August 1; *Qiushi*, August 16, 2004). Finally, PLAN Political Commissar Liu Xiaojiang is the son-in-law of the late reformist party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, whose funeral ceremony sparked the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations. Although Liu has not openly advocated reform, he has worked to honor Hu's memory—something now implicitly linked to political reforms [9].

In contrast, two of the new CMC selectees, former Beijing MR Commander Fang Fenghui and former Shenyang MR Commander Zhang Youxia, were long-considered almost certain to be appointed to the CMC. Both have served in multiple MRs. Both are young enough to serve two five-year terms. Both also are politically well-connected. Fang is presumably a protégé of outgoing CMC Vice Chairman Guo Boxiong under whom he served in the Lanzhou MR. Fang also orchestrated the PLA's role in China's 60th anniversary parade in 2009 (*South China Morning Post*, November 8). Zhang is the son of former GLD Director Zhang Zongxun, who served with incoming Party General Secretary Xi Jinping's father in the headquarters of the First Field Army in the 1940s. The younger Zhang is a veteran of both China's 1979 conflict with Vietnam and early 1980s border clashes.

Neither Fang nor Zhang, however, were considered the most likely choice to lead the GSD until early this year, when the leading candidate, executive deputy chief of the GSD Zhang Qinsheng, age 64, (no relation to Zhang Youxia) reportedly clashed publicly with his colleagues at a holiday banquet, torpedoing his career (*New York Times*, August 7). Zhang—a prominent defense intellectual and early enthusiast among the PLA officer corps of the way information technology was transforming modern warfare—had been director of the Campaign Teaching and Research Office and then Dean of Studies at China's National Defense University (*China Leadership Monitor*, No. 17, January 30, 2006). He had served as director of the GSD's Operations Department and later as assistant to the chief of the GSD in charge of intelligence and foreign affairs before being given command of the Guangzhou MR in 2007—presumably to give him the operational command experience requisite for higher office. Had Zhang been selected, he would have brought considerable diversity in terms of staff and higher education experience to the new lineup, despite being limited to one term. Instead, Zhang's collapse opened the way for Fang to become chief of the GSD. Zhang Youxia became director of the GAD. Zhao Keshi, age 65, commander of the Nanjing MR, who would have otherwise been forced to retire, became director of the GLD. Zhao's experience in the Nanjing MR—which is responsible primarily for Taiwan contingencies—may have figured in his selection; however, the necessarily limited number of senior ground officers eligible for this promotion probably assisted in his rise.

Zhao Keshi and Fan Changlong's appointments at their advanced age also assures that the CMC will experience another significant turnover—of half its uniformed members—in five years. In 2017, at least the senior CMC vice chairman, director of the General Logistics Department, Minister of National Defense, and commanders of the PLAN and PLAAF are likely to retire. Beijing will then have another opportunity for either more thorough reform or retrenchment.

Daniel Tobin, Kim Fessler and Justin Godby are analysts with the Department of Defense. The views expressed here are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Department of Defense or any other entity within the U.S. Government.

Sourcing Note: Judgments about the comparative career attributes of the incoming and outgoing CMC lineups are derived from data on their individual careers found in three places apart from official curricula vitae that have been cross-checked. The sources are as follows:

- (1) Online Chinese wikis with entries on individual CMC members, including <http://baike.baidu.com> and <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/>;
- (2) Hong Kong journalism, primarily several collective biographies of China's military leaders, including the following: Xu Santong, *Junzhong Shaozhuangpai Zhangwo Zhongguo Bingquan* [Up-and-Coming Generals Take Over China's Military Leadership], Hong Kong: Hays Chubanshe, 2009; Yu Shiping, *Xin Taiji Jun: Fubei Da Jiangshan, Women Bao Jiangshan* [The New Princeling Military: Our Fathers' Generation Took Power, We Will Protect It], Hong Kong: Mingjing Chubanshe, 2010; and Jin Qianli, *Diwudai Jiangxing: Zhonggong Dui Tai Zuo Zhang Zhongjian Remnu* [The Fifth Generation's Military Stars: The Chinese Communist Party's Crucial Figures in a War with Taiwan], Hong Kong: Xiafeier, 2006, in addition to profiles of individual military leaders that have appeared in the Hong Kong magazine *Chien Shao* [Frontline] over the past decade.
- (3) Biographical details contained in scholarly analysis of the last major CMC turnover in 2002 from, especially, Dean Cheng, Ken Gause, Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise,

James Mulvenon and David Shambaugh.

Notes:

1. According to the Hong Kong press, for example, Liang Guanglie and Fan Changlong drew the attention of senior leaders (including then-Vice President Hu Jintao) during flood fighting efforts in 1998. See the chapter on Fan in Jin Qianli cited above, pp. 300–314.
2. If both Xu Qiliang and Wu Shengli had been promoted to more senior CMC positions, their presence combined with their replacements as air force and navy commanders, along with the presence of the commander of the Second Artillery, would have made for five of ten uniformed officers on the CMC not hailing from the ground force. This was the most favored scenario by many China leadership watchers.
3. Our understanding of the crucial role of the PLA grade structure in determining the eligibility of CMC candidates is based upon the published and unpublished work of Kenneth Allen. Any errors, however, are the authors' own. See, for example, "Assessing the PLA's Promotion Ladder to CMC Member Based on Grades vs. Ranks – Part 1" *China Brief*, July 22, 2010, and "Assessing the PLA's Promotion Ladder to CMC Member Based on Grades vs. Ranks – Part 2," *China Brief*, August 5, 2010.
4. Guo Boxiong had been promoted to the CMC in 1999 as a deputy chief of the GSD. This, like Fan's promotion directly into a vice chairman position, was a violation of the PLA's rules regarding military grade (deputy chief of the GSD is not a CMC-member grade position), but it at least gave Guo experience on the CMC that Fan lacks. And Guo was likely chosen for this promotion precisely because he was young enough to serve too terms.
5. The PLA's terminology refers to these as "third generation" rather than the Western "fourth generation." For the scope of this transformation, see, for example, David Shlapak, "Equipping the PLAAF: The Long March to Modernity" in Richard P. Hallion, Roger Cliff, and Phillip C. Saunders, eds., *The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities*, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2012, pp. 191–211.
6. For a discussion of the role of the Ministry of National Defense see Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, Second Edition, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 36–37. Based on the defense minister's public appearances in official state media, however, we think the defense minister's responsibilities are broader, including civil-military integration, defense education, defense legislation before the National People's Congress and the peacetime, preparatory aspects of coordination with civilian officials on defense mobilization issues.
7. In the outgoing CMC, for example, Vice Chairman Guo Boxiong was an operational track officer and Vice Chairman Xu Caihou was a political track officer.
8. Another prominent "princeling," political commissar of the Second Artillery and former political commissar of the Chengdu MR, Zhang Haiyang, who is the son of former CMC Vice Chairman Zhang Zhen, may have been disqualified owing to close ties with fallen Politburo member Bo Xilai.
9. See the account provided in the chapter on Liu Xiaojiang in Yu Shiping, cited above, pp. 255–297.

Professionalism and Factionalism in the PLA Leadership Selection

By Willy Lam

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The Beijing leadership has reshuffled the high command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as the military goes through its own leadership transition separate from but linked to the 18th Party Congress beginning later this week. The move, which was announced last week, has also given hints about the reorganization of the policy-setting Central Military Commission (CMC). The membership of a much rejuvenated CMC will be confirmed by the 18th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress, which is due to open on November 8. Although this round

of personnel selection reinforces the PLA's increasing dedication to professionalism in its upper echelons, this series of personnel changes also reflects intense horse-trading among the party's principal factions.

The new chiefs of the “Four General Departments”—the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD) and General Armaments Department (GAD)—are respectively General Fang Fenghui (age 61); General Zhang Yang, age 61; General Zhao Keshi, age 65; and General Zhang Youxia, age 62. Moreover, General Ma Xiaotian, age 63, and General Wei Fenghe, age 58, have been appointed Commander of respectively the Air Force and the Second Artillery. The incumbent Commander of the Navy, Wu Shengli, age 67, is expected to remain in his post for the foreseeable future. Also named were a dozen-odd new deputy and assistant chiefs of the headquarters units as well as the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery (*PLA Daily*, October 25; China News Service, October 25).

The chiefs of the four general departments as well as the three military services will become ordinary members of the CMC. Uncertainties, however, still hang over the identities of the top CMC leadership. According to reports out of Beijing and Hong Kong, President Hu, age 69 will stay on as CMC chairman for at least two years beyond his retirement from the Politburo and the Central Committee at the 18th CCP Congress. The precedent for this in the post-revolutionary generation was set by ex-president Jiang Zemin, who continued being CMC chair for almost two years after his retirement from all other party slots at the 16th Party Congress in 2002. This means that Vice President Xi Jinping, age 59, who is slated to soon replace Hu as CCP general secretary, will remain CMC vice chairman for the time being. The two new CMC vice chairmen are former PLA Air Force Commander General Xu Qiliang, age 62 and Commander of the Jinan Military Region General Fan Changlong (age 65). The newly retired GAD Director, General Chang Wanquan, age 63, is set to replace General Liang Guanglie as Defense Minister (Xinhua, November 4; *Wen Wei Po* [Hong Kong] October 26; *South China Morning Post*, October 26; *Apple Daily* [Hong Kong] October 25).

The just-named Chief of the General Staff General Fang perhaps best exemplifies the new generation of

professionally savvy officers. Fang, a native of Shaanxi Province and graduate of the elite National Defense University, was the youngest of China's seven regional commanders when he was given the No. 1 post of the Beijing Military Region (MR) in 2007. Apart from his command-and-control skills, Fang 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 General Fang's favorite mottoes is that “radically changing times demand innovation in strategic theories.” President Hu was said to be very impressed with Fang's orchestration of the 2009 military parade in Beijing, which marked the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. Last year, Fang won plaudits when he supervised complicated-scale maneuvers involving more than 30,000 soldiers from the Beijing, Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs. While the great majority of his predecessors as Beijing MR commander went into retirement after serving in this sensitive position, General Fang seems to have a bright future ahead of him (*Ta Kung Pao* [Hong Kong] October 26; *Southern Metropolitan News* [Guangzhou] October 25; Ifeng.com [Beijing], August 29, 2011).

Two hot contenders for the post of GPD director lost out apparently due to their close association with the disgraced Politburo member and Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai. They are the Political Commissar of the General Logistics Department General Liu Yuan, age 61, and the Political Commissar of the Second Artillery General Zhang Haiyang, age 63. Like Bo, who is the son of revolutionary hero Bo Yibo, Generals Liu and Zhang are deemed high-profile princelings. General Liu is the son of the late state president Liu Shaoqi, while General Zhang is the son of former Politburo member General Zhang Zhen. While Bo has never served in the PLA, he has a large following amongst the “princeling generals.” The charismatic former Politburo member is due to be put on trial for alleged crimes including large-scale corruption and dereliction of duty (*Sing Tao Daily* [Hong Kong] October 24; *Ming Pao* [Hong Kong] October 24).

After Bo was detained by authorities in mid-March, PLA disciplinary authorities have run numerous campaigns to promote the ideal of “the party's absolute leadership over the army.” An August 1 Army Day commentary in the *PLA Daily* made an unusual reference to the army's immunity against being manipulated by “ambitious

careerists” in the mould of Bo. “In the midst of even the most dangerous situations, not a single troop in our army’s history has mutineered or surrendered to the enemy,” said the *Daily* commentary, “And not even the most cunning and ambitious careerist has been able to use the army to realize his conspiracy” (*PLA Daily*, August 1; Xinhua, August 1). In a talk last month, then-CMC Vice Chairman Xu Caihou urged officers and soldiers to “ensure that the troops must uphold a high level of unison with the central party leadership and the CMC in the areas of thought and politics.” Xu added “We must resolutely listen to the directions of the party central leadership, the CMC and Chairman Hu” (Xinhua, October 11; *PLA Daily*, October 11).

In terms of factional dynamics, President Hu seems to be a major beneficiary of the reshuffle. Apart from Chief of the General Staff General Fang, GPD Director General Zhang is said to be close to the supremo. Given that the GPD controls functions including appointments and discipline, Hu may through his close ties with General Zhang be able to maintain some say in personnel matters even after his departure from the CMC. Hu’s clout also is evidenced by the surprise appointment of another protégé, the relatively inexperienced Hong Kong Garrison commander Zhang Shibo, as General Fang’s successor as Beijing MR commander. Before assuming the Hong Kong posting in late 2007, Zhang, a 60 year-old lieutenant general, was commander of the 20th Group Army (*Apple Daily*, October 26; Sina.com, October 24).

Other appointments may reflect the preferences of ex-president Jiang and Vice President Xi. The probable promotion of Jinan MR Commander General Fan to the CMC vice chairmanship reflects Jiang’s residual influence. General Fan is the protégé of soon-to-retire CMC Vice Chairman General Xu, who is deemed Jiang’s “unofficial representative” in the CMC. Both Generals Xu and Fan had served for long periods in the 16th Group Army. Earlier this year, General Fan (age 65) was expected to be leaving the armed forces after having reached the mandatory retirement age for regional commanders. Xi’s influence in the PLA has been adversely affected by the fact that the career of several princeling generals has been hurt by their association with Bo Xilai. New Air Force commander General Ma Xiaotian and GAD Director General Zhang Youxia, however, are notable princelings. General Zhang is thought to be particularly close to Xi.

The fathers of Xi and General Zhang, respectively Xi Zhongxun and General Zhang Zongxun were close allies when both worked in northwestern China before the CCP came into power in 1949 (*Ming Pao*, October 25; *Sing Tao Daily*, October 25).

The marathon reshuffles also have followed the tradition begun by President Hu of the frequent movement of personnel not only across different military elements but also from headquarters to the regions. For example, the Political Commissar of the Chengdu MR, General Tian Xiusi, was made the Political Commissar of the Air Force. Assistant GPD Director General Wei Liangzhong became the Political Commissar of the Guangzhou MR, while General Wang Guanzhong, the veteran Director of the PLA General Office, was appointed a Deputy Chief of the GSD (*Ming Pao*, October 26; *Ta Kung Pao*, October 25). Also notable are the proverbial “helicopter rides” taken by the likes of General Fan of the Jinan MR and General Zhang of the Hong Kong Garrison. It is very rare for a regional commander to be elevated directly to CMC vice chairman. General Zhang’s promotion to the post of Beijing MR Commander is also unusual. In light of the importance of the Beijing MR, only officers who had held senior posts such as deputy commander or chief of the general staff of the country’s seven MRs had been named to that sensitive slot (*Ta Kung Pao*, October 24; *Apple Daily*, October 24).

Given that factional loyalty is a key consideration behind the on-going personnel movements, it is perhaps not surprising that not as much priority has been given to weeding out corruption in the military. This is despite the fact that General Liu Yuan—one of the high-profile losers in the promotion sweepstakes—was praised highly for initiating an anti-graft campaign within the GLD early this year. Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu, a professor at the National Defense University and a respected military commentator, pointed out recently that “corrupt generals” were an even more serious problem than “corrupt cadres.” Last month, Liu said “Corruption is the only force that can defeat the PLA.” “Yet the forces of corruption are more powerful than those of fighting corruption,” he added. “And perpetrators of corruption are more resourceful than graft busters” (*Wen Wei Po*, October 8; Sina.com, October 8). The onus is on the post-18th Party Congress leadership to demonstrate that members of the newly promoted top brass live up

to the oft-repeated motto of *decai jianbei*, that is, “having high moral attributes as well as being professionally competent.”

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Hu Jintao’s Doubtful Future on the Central Military Commission

By Peter Mattis

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With the Beidaihe retreat coming to a close this week and Chinese leaders reemerging from behind closed doors, China’s leaders are in the home stretch for deciding the outcomes of the 18th Party Congress. Some of the issues at stake are the size of the Politburo, who will make it into the Politburo Standing Committee, and a miscellany of other important personnel appointments, like Shanghai’s party chief. One of the most consequential questions is whether President Hu Jintao will hold onto the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which oversees the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), after he resigns as general secretary this fall. Some speculation suggests Hu will follow his predecessor’s path and oversee military affairs in quasi-retirement (*Ming Pao*, July 22; *Apple Daily*, May 30). The idea of precedent looms large for a China-watching community starved of reliable, current information. President Hu, however, appears unlikely to retain the CMC chairmanship past the 18th Party Congress based on the factors that allowed Jiang Zemin to continue in that capacity after resigning as general secretary.

The idea of President Hu staying on as chair of the Central

Military Commission has precedent with both Deng Xiaoping and Jiang. In 1987, Deng resigned from all of his posts except for the CMC chairmanship, ostensibly to turn governance over to the rising generation, led at that time by the ill-fated General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. As Hu Jintao took the party reins in 2002 at the 16th Party Congress, then-President Jiang Zemin did not relinquish the CMC chair, following in Deng’s footsteps [1].

Around the first National People’s Congress after the 16th Party Congress, the PLA started to express some reticence about Jiang’s continuing leadership of military affairs while another leader, Hu, ostensibly led the rest of the party and government. In an editorial by a senior *PLA Daily* editor, the PLA suggested this arrangement was not helpful: “Having one center is called ‘loyalty,’ while having two centers will result in ‘problems.’ Having multiple centers is the same as having no center, and having no center results in having no success in any area” (*Asia Times*, March 12, 2003; *PLA Daily*, March 11, 2003). That this became an important issue is suggested by Jiang’s remarks at the time his resignation was announced. Jiang said the three key positions of Chinese power—party general secretary, state president and CMC chair—most appropriately and necessarily should belong to the same person (*Xinhua*, September 20, 2004).

There is little reason to suggest the PLA has changed its position on the perils of a divided command. Since at least March, the propaganda line has been a consistent statement about the clear relationship between the party and the army—not between a civilian leader and the PLA. The recognition of Hu Jintao’s role as leader of the party and the role of the party’s general secretary also suggests the PLA stands by Jiang’s reasoning for unity of command (“Army Day Coverage Stresses PLA’s Contributions and Party Control,” *China Brief*, August 17; *The Diplomat*, July 3).

The next question is whether Hu would have the support of the military to overcome this reluctance. When Jiang retained the CMC chair, the PLA was one of the strongest institutional supporters of his contribution to Chinese ideological canon, the “Three Represents,” promulgated on July 1, 2001. Through the next year, senior PLA generals—including the ambitious Cao Gangchuan and then-CMC Vice Chairmen Chi Haotian and Zhang Wannian—fell over themselves to endorse the concepts in

the *PLA Daily*, *Qiusbi* [Seeking Truth], Xinhua and other outlets, elevating Jiang Zemin to positions comparable to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping for his contributions to Marxist thinking and China's development ("The PLA and the 'Three Represents': Jiang's Bodyguards or Party-Army?" *China Leadership Monitor*, Fall 2002). Although the PLA did not quite declare fealty to Jiang, this propaganda blitz raised questions about the re-personalization of the military and suggests the PLA supported retaining Jiang on the CMC. The PLA's endorsement of Hu's "scientific development concept," by comparison, is rather pro forma, suggesting he lacks the same kind of institutional support.

A second and related question is whether Chinese leaders believe the international situation is sufficiently dangerous that the ostensible uncertainty caused by a CMC leadership transition would be undesirable. This was the reason given in 2002 that justified Jiang's continued CMC chairmanship (Xinhua, September 19, 2004; *Wen Wei Po*, September 16, 2002). In July, Hong Kong media suggested tensions in the South China Sea could be used by Hu to do just that (*Ming Pao*, July 22). Beijing's aggressive but adroit diplomacy, however, seems to have settled the latest round of territorial spats that began this spring at Scarborough Shoal ("Sansha: New City in the South China Sea," *China Brief*, August 17; "China Pushes on the South China Sea, ASEAN Unity Collapses," *China Brief*, August 3). Given the seemingly paranoid views of Western cultural infiltration, the "five poisons," and "Western hostile forces," it is difficult to get a clear grasp of what Beijing's threat perceptions truly are at any given time (*Red Flag*, May 24; *Qiusbi*, January 1). The ostensibly most authoritative recent public assessment of China's threat environment comes from the well-connected Beijing University professor Wang Jisi. Wang, however, while noting China's more constrained international situation, did not endorse a sense of crisis in Beijing's position (*Global Times*, June 13).

If Hu Jintao retains the CMC chair, then it probably will have been the result of a power play that demonstrates Hu has had more power than is typically ascribed to him. He has seemed to float between rhetorical inconsequence and the ability to target individual opponents within the Chinese system, such as Chen Liangyu and Bo Xilai ("The Soapbox and the Truncheon: Hu Jintao's Amorphous

Power," *China Brief*, July 19). Retaining the CMC chair would allow Hu to play a lasting role in Chinese national security policymaking, but the position probably would be limited in terms of promoting the members of his China Youth League faction up the ranks—except as a one-time bargaining chip to trade away. Given the reports of a contentious relationship with some military leaders—including one he promoted to general—the former may not be sufficient reason for Hu to want to stay on (*New York Times*, August 7; *Ming Pao*, July 22).

On balance, however, the prognosis does not look good for Hu Jintao retaining the CMC chair for the next two years unless new signs of the PLA rallying behind him in the coming weeks amid some sort of crisis. Whether Hu steps down or not, it may not indicate anything important about the institutionalization of Chinese politics. Nevertheless, if the positions of party general secretary, state president and CMC chair transition smoothly to Xi Jinping at the 18th Party Congress, then China still will have seen its first clear transition of power under the Chinese Communist Party.

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Notes:

1. The best analysis of the CMC transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao appeared in James Mulvenon's articles for the *China Leadership Monitor* from 2002 to 2005, especially issues 4, 5, 7 and 13.

Assessing the PLA's Promotion Ladder to CMC Member Based on Grades vs. Ranks – Part 1

By Kenneth W. Allen

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As China approaches the 18th Party Congress in late 2012, followed by the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) in early 2013, China watchers have begun to speculate about the next cadre of Chinese military leaders who will become members and vice chairmen of the Communist Party's Central Military Commission (CMC) [1]. The premise of these analyses tend to focus on which officers either already have or might receive their third star (*shangjiang*) as a general or admiral between now and 2012. Unlike the U.S. military, whose generals and admirals wear four stars, PLA generals and admirals wear only three stars. While military rank is an important distinction in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) hierarchy, a closer examination of the promotion path to becoming a CMC member reveals that it depends more on the PLA's 15-grade (*zhimu dengji*) structure than the 10-rank (*junxian*) structure [2].

This two-part series thoroughly examines the grade requirements for PLA officers to become the director of each of the four General Departments—General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Armament Department (GAD)—and the commander of the Navy (PLAN), Air Force (PLAAF), and Second Artillery. These articles also discuss their respective protocol order on the CMC, which is different for the four directors (based on position) and the three commanders (based on seniority). This is important because the protocol order and placement of the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery commanders on the CMC as a “policy promotion,” which is not an automatic promotion upon becoming the commander, implies that the eight members of the CMC may not be equal in terms of their authority.

Although the articles do not speculate on potential

CMC members in 2012, it does lay down an analytical framework, which leads to the speculation that the next Second Artillery commander may not immediately become a CMC member until he meets time-in-grade requirements. The article raises the question whether non-Army officers might serve as CMC vice chairmen.

PLA Grades vs. Ranks

The terms “grade” and “rank” are basically synonymous in the U.S. and Chinese military, whereby each branch has 10 officer grades and their equivalent rank (e.g. an 0-10 can be a four-star general or admiral). In the PLA, however, grades are based on an officer's position and are more important than ranks. As a result, PLA writings usually refer to officer positions or grades and have few references to ranks.

Within the PLA, an officer's grade, not the rank, reflects authority and responsibility across service, branch, and organizational lines. While rank is a key indicator of position within the hierarchy of foreign militaries, grade is the key indicator of authority within the PLA. In the PLA commanders and political commissars (PC), who are collectively called “leaders” (*lingdao* or *shouzhong*), are co-equals and hold the same grade, but they often do not wear the same rank.

For example, the current commanders of the Beijing Military Region (MR), Lanzhou MR, and Nanjing MR all received their third star as a general on July 19, 2010, while each MR's political commissar remains as a two-star lieutenant general. Meanwhile, the political commissars for the Guangzhou MR and Chengdu MR received their third star, while the commanders remain as two stars (Xinhuanet, July 19, 2010).

Each PLA Organization Is Assigned a Grade

Another major difference between the U.S. military and the PLA is that the U.S. military assigns grades to officers and billets, but not to organizations, whereas the PLA assigns grades to every officer and billet, *as well as* every organization (e.g. operational and support unit headquarters, academic institutions, and research institutions). With only a few exceptions, the organization's grade is the same as that of the commander and political

commissar. For example:

- The Four General Departments are all CMC member-grade organizations, and each director is a CMC member-grade officer.
- The PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery are MR leader-grade organizations, and each political commissar is an MR leader-grade officer; however, each commander is currently a CMC member-grade officer (see discussion below).
- The Academy of Military Science (AMS) and National Defense University (NDU) are MR leader-grade organizations, and each commandant and political commissar is an MR leader-grade officer.
- The one exception is that the Ministry of National Defense (MND), which actually serves as the foreign affairs arm of the PLA, is not assigned a grade.

Current Grade and Rank Structure

In 1988, the PLA implemented its current grade and rank system, which has 15 grades and 10 ranks, as shown in Figure 1. The previous system, which had 17 grades, was implemented in 1979. The PLA implemented its first rank system in 1955 and abolished it at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1965. It did not re-institute a new system until 1988.

Figure 1: Current PLA Grade and Rank Structure

Retirement Age	Grade	Primary Rank	Secondary Rank
70?	CMC chairman (<i>junwei zhuxi</i>) CMC vice chairmen (<i>junwei fuzhuxi</i>)	N/A GEN/ADM	N/A
68/70?	CMC member (<i>junwei weiyuan</i>)	GEN/ADM	N/A
65	MR leader (<i>daqu zhengzhi</i>)	GEN/ADM	LTG/VADM
63	MR deputy leader (<i>daqu fuzhi</i>)	LTG/VADM	MG/RADM*
55	Corps leader (<i>zhengjunzhi</i>)	MG/RADM*	LTG/VADM
	Corps deputy leader (<i>fujunzhi</i>)	MG/RADM*	SCOL/SCAPT
50	Division leader (<i>zhengshizhi</i>)	SCOL/SCAPT	MG/RADM*
	Division deputy leader (<i>fushizhi</i>) / (Brigade leader)	COL/CAPT	SCOL/SCAPT

Most importantly, each grade from Platoon leader to MR leader has a primary and secondary rank. At the same time, however, certain ranks, such as a one-star (major general/rear admiral) can be assigned to one of four grades (MR deputy leader, corps leader, corps deputy leader, and division leader as noted in * underneath Figure 1). In addition, each grade has a mandatory retirement age. It is not clear, however, what the mandatory retirement age for CMC members is, but it may be either 68 or 70. The retirement age for CMC vice chairmen is also unclear, but may be 70 or above.

The PLA did not implement a mandatory retirement age of 65 for MR leader-grade officers until 1995. Based on interviews with PLA officers, the mandatory age for CMC Members following the 16th Party Congress was set at 70, but that may have changed following the 17th Party Congress.

Grade and Rank Promotion Schedule

When discussing PLA promotions, one must clarify whether it is a promotion in grade or a promotion in rank, because they typically do not occur at the same time. In the PLA, officers must serve in a particular grade and rank for a minimum amount of time before being promoted to the next grade and rank. Furthermore, with only a few exceptions, PLA officers are not normally promoted in grade and rank at the same time. For example, regulations specify that officers from first lieutenant to colonel receive a rank promotion every four years, but

receive their grade promotions from platoon leader to division leader every three years.

PLA regulations specify three years time-in-grade and four years time-in-rank for platoon to corps-level officers. PLA Officer Rank Regulations Amended on 20 December 2002. PLA Active-Duty Officer Law, Published on 28 December 2000. Interviews with PLA officials in Beijing during November 2006 and November 2010.

This stair step approach is reflected in the primary and secondary rank structure shown in Figure 1 above. It is not clear what the time in rank and time in grade requirements are for one-star flag officers and corps leader and above grades, but it appears that there is definitely a minimum requirement for each—possibly three to four years.

It is also important to understand which billets have the same grade. For example, unit deputy commanders and the Chief of Staff (e.g. director of the Headquarters Department) always have the same grade.

PLA units have multiple deputy commanders. For example, every Military Region has five deputy commanders, one of which, since 1988, is the Military Region Air Force (MRAF) commander. Since 1988, the commander of each of the PLA Navy’s three fleet headquarter has also concurrently been a Military Region deputy commander.

As a result, a Chief of Staff can move directly to becoming the commander. For example, the current director of the GAD, General Chang Wanquan, previously served as the

Figure 2: CMC Members under the 16th and 17th Party Congresses (Protocol Order)

Organizational Protocol Order		Position Protocol Order	16th Party Congress	17th Party Congress	CMC Protocol Order Criteria
Army	GSD	Chief of the General Staff	1	1	Based on Organization
	GPD	Director	2	2	
	GLD	Director	3	3	
	GAD	Director	4	4	
Navy		Commander	6	6	Based on Seniority
Air Force		Commander	5	7	
Second Artillery		Commander	7	5	

Lanzhou MR Chief of Staff and the Beijing MR Chief of Staff before becoming the Shenyang MR commander. He did not serve as an MR deputy commander.

CMC Member Grade

Knowing what grade the PLA assigns to each billet helps China watchers understand what the probable promotion ladder to the CMC member and vice chairmen grades looks like. Yet, the CMC member grade, as well as the military region leader grade, is complicated.

- First, the current senior CMC member, General Liang Guanglie, is concurrently the Minister of National Defense [3].
- Second, the grade for all of the Four General Departments and each director is CMC member grade.
- Third, the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery are MR leader-grade organizations, but their commanders are CMC member-grade officers.

Figure 2 provides information for the CMC members and their protocol order under the 16th and 17th Party Congresses. Their protocol order, which is based on either their organization or seniority, provides some insight into the CMC member grade.

As can be seen, the protocol order for the four General Departments, regardless of who the leaders are, remains the same. The reason for this is that these four organizations are assigned the grade of CMC member. For example, even though Li Jinai and Liao Xilong became CMC members in 2002, Chen Bingde, who became the GAD director in 2004, is still listed first due his position as Chief of the General Staff based on the protocol order for the Four General Departments.

Conclusion

Although the author does not assume to predict the potential CMC members in 2012, the author does speculate that the next Second Artillery commander may not immediately become a CMC member until he meets “time-in-grade” (TIG) requirements. The promotions in 2010 will provide the first glimpse at the PLA’s possible leaders who will emerge at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. However, one should not focus on the ranks but on the grades, especially the MR leader-grade level that will be addressed in the second part of this series. This is particularly important when determining who the next Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery commanders, as well as the next Chief of the General Staff, will be.

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Notes

1. See Cheng Li, *China’s Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012 (Part 3: Military Leaders)* and Alice L. Miller, “The 18th Central Committee Politburo: A Quixotic, Foolhardy, Rashly Speculative, but Nonetheless Ruthlessly Reasoned Projection,” in *China Leadership Monitor*, June 28, 2010, Issue 33, which is available at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor>. See also Joseph Y. Lin, “Reorientation of China’s Armed Forces: Implications for the Future Promotions of PLA Generals, China Brief, Vol X, Issue 13, June 24, 2010, 7-10, which is available at http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb_010_64.pdf.
2. The information in this article is taken mostly from Kenneth W. Allen and John F. Corbett, Jr., *Civil-Military Change in China: Elites, Institutes, and Ideas After the 16th Party Congress*, Dr. Andrew Scobell and Dr. Larry Wortzel, eds., Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2004, Chapter 8, 257-278, which is available at www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub413.pdf.

pdf; and *China’s Navy 2007*, The Office of Naval Intelligence, Chapters 1 and 2, 1-16, which is available at www.fas.org/irp/agency/oni/chinanavy2007.pdf.

3. In China, the Ministry of National Defense is responsible only for implementing the PLA’s foreign affairs. It does not have a political commissar. Liang Guanglie’s two predecessors, Cao Gangchuan and Chi Haotian, were concurrently CMC vice chairmen.

Assessing the PLA’s Promotion Ladder to CMC Member Based on Grades vs. Ranks – Part 2

By Kenneth W. Allen*

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On July 19, Central Military Commission (CMC) Chairman Hu Jintao promoted 11 military officers to three stars (general/admiral), bringing the total since 1988 to 129 officers (Xinhua News Agency, July 27) [1]. Based on previous patterns, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) will most likely promote a few more officers to three stars during at least one ceremony per year in mid-2011 and 2012. Together, these promotions will help determine the next cadre of members and vice chairmen of the Party’s CMC to be elevated during the 18th Party Congress in late 2012. These promotions will also help determine the next Minister of National Defense, since General Liang Guanglie will have met his mandatory retirement age by the next Party conclave.

Although these rank promotions are important indicators of who the next leaders might be, the purpose of this two-part series is to add another important analytical tool—the PLA’s grade structure—for China watchers to use in discerning patterns in the promotion ladder within the PLA. While rank and grade promotions, as well as an officer’s age, are visible indicators, personal relationships (*guanxi*) and an Army-dominated system add a less predictable but arguably equally important

layer, especially for ascertaining who the next CMC vice chairmen will be. China watchers therefore must use all of these tools to help predict who the next cadres of Chinese military leaders will be.

Age as a Key Factor

Age is also a key factor in predicting who the next CMC vice chairmen and members will be. According to Dr. Alice Miller of the Hoover Institution:

“The retirement age of 68 for Politburo members is based on the year they were born and the year that a Party Congress opens or closes. Specifically, if the Party continues to adhere to this rule for the 18th Party Congress in 2012, any Politburo member who was born in 1944 or before will retire, and anyone who was born in 1945 or after is eligible to remain in their position until the next Party Congress. The year 1945 would be the cutoff date for Politburo members. So *if* [emphasis added] the 1994 PLA regulations still hold, then 1) the retirement age for CMC members is 70, which means their cutoff date to retire would be 1942, and 2) they could remain in their position if they were born in 1943 or later. However, if the age for CMC retirement has been lowered to 68, then 1945 is the cutoff date” [2].

Figure 1: CMC Vice Chairmen (1995-2010)

Vice Chairman	Concurrent Positions	Previous Position
Guo Boxiong (2002-2010)	Member, 16th and 17th CCP Politburo	Executive DCGS and CMC Member (1999-2002)
Xu Caihou (2004-2010)	Member, 17th CCP Politburo Member, 16th CPC Secretariat	Director, GPD and CMC Member (2002-2004)
Cao Gangchuan (2002-2007)	Member, 16th CCP Politburo Minister of National Defense (2003-2007)	Director, GAD and CMC Member (1998-2002)
Zhang Wannian (1995-2002)	Member, 15th CCP Politburo	CGS and CMC Member (1992-1995)
Chi Haotian (1995-2002)	Minister of National Defense (1993-2003)	CGS and CMC Member (1987-1993)

CMC Vice Chairmen

As Figure 1 shows, there does not appear to be a set pattern for who is appointed as CMC vice chairmen, except that each one previously served as a CMC member. Whereas the 16th Party Congress' CMC had three vice chairmen, one of whom served concurrently as the Minister of Defense, the 17th Party Congress has only two vice chairmen, neither of who is serving concurrently as the Minister of Defense. In light of the current circumstances, it is safe to say that the 18th Party Congress will have at least two vice chairmen, but it is not clear if one of them will also be the Minister of Defense.

Of note, although two military officers have served on the CCP Politburo for at least the past two decades, none have served on the Politburo Standing Committee since Liu Huaqing retired in 1996 [3].

Minister of Defense

Whereas Chi Haotian and Cao Gangchuan served concurrently as CMC vice chairmen, members of the CCP Politburo and Minister of National Defense, the current Minister of National Defense, Liang Guanglie, is concurrently a CMC member but not a vice chairman or Politburo member. As a result, it is difficult to predict who the next Minister of National Defense will be and whether he will be a CMC member or a vice chairman.

Even if he is appointed as a vice chairman, there is no guarantee he will also be a concurrent Politburo member. Finally, because the Ministry of National Defense is subordinate to the State Council, the next Minister of National Defense will most likely not be appointed until the 12th National People’s Congress (NPC) in early 2013.

CMC Members

Part 1 identified the CMC member billets and briefly discussed the protocol order and difference between the directors of the four General Departments and commanders of the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery. The following paragraphs discuss the Military Region (MR) leader-grade billets and how they are a stepping-stone to the CMC member grade.

The MR leader grade is the most complicated grade to understand, because the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery are MR leader-grade organizations, but their commanders are CMC member-grade officers. Figure 2 shows the key billets with MR leader grades.

Figure 2: Military Region Leader-Grade Billets and Ranks [4]

	Billets	Ranks (Primary and Secondary)
M R leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commander and PC, MR • Commander and PC, PLAN • Commander and PC, PLAAF • Commander and PC, Second Artillery • Commandant and PC, AMS • Commandant and PC, NDU • Deputy chiefs of the General Staff • Deputy directors, GPD 	General and Lt. General

According to retired Colonel John Corbett, the July 2010 group of promotions demonstrates the path to full general, which combines rank and grade promotions consisting of three observable steps:

- Step One: Lieutenant generals (LTGs) in a Military Region (MR) deputy leader-grade *move laterally* to a second position in the same grade
- Step Two: After three or so years, they receive a *grade promotion* to an MR leader-grade position, and
- Step Three: After three years or so as a LTG in an MR leader-grade position, they receive a *rank promotion* to full general [Note: not all MR leader-grade officers receive their third star] [5].

In order to become a CMC member-grade officer, an officer first serves in one of the above MR leader-grade billets; however, not every officer who serves in one of these billets becomes a CMC member.

Analysis of previous CMC members, the following paragraphs, along with John Corbett’s three-step cycle, identify some basic patterns in the PLA promotion ladder. See below for more information about the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery commander grade situation.

Chief of the General Staff

The Chief of the General Staff (CGS) is the director of the General Staff Department. As shown in Figure 3, the CGSs have always served in at least one assignment as an MR commander. The current CGS since 2007, Chen Bingde, served previously as the commander of the Nanjing MR (1996-1999), commander of the Jinan MR (1999-2004) and director of the GAD (2004-2007) [6].

The GSD generally has four to five deputy Chiefs of the General Staff (DCGS) billets. Until the early 2000s, Army officers held almost all of those billets. Since then, however, PLAN and PLAAF officers, but no Second Artillery officers, have served as a DCGS. To date, no Army officers who have served as a DCGS have become the CGS; however, Guo Boxiong served as the executive DCGS and concurrently as a CMC member before being promoted directly as a CMC vice chairman. On the other hand, serving as a DCGS is one of three possible MR

Figure 3: Chiefs of the General Staff (1987-Present)

GSD Director	Previous Position	Previous Position
Chen Bingde	Director, GAD	Commander, Jinan MR
Liang Guanglie (2002-2007)	Commander, Nanjing MR	Commander, Shenyang MR
Fu Quanyou (1995-2002)	Director, GLD	Commander, Lanzhou MR
Zhang Wannian (1992-1995)	Commander, Jinan MR	Commander, Guangzhou MR

leader-grade billets, along with serving as the commandant of the Academy of Military Science or National Defense University, for Navy and Air Force officers to become their respective service commander and a CMC member.

Director, General Logistics Department

A review of the career track for the PLA's four GLD directors since 1978, as shown in Figure 4, provides some indications of the qualifications required to become the next director. Of particular note, the last three officers were military/command track officers rather than logistics track officers, while Zhao Nanqi was a political officer [7]. In addition, Fu Quanyou moved from the GLD to become the CGS in 1992.

Figure 4: GLD Directors (1987-Present)

GLD Director	Previous Position	Previous Position
Liao Xilong	Commander, Chengdu MR	Deputy Commander, Chengdu MR
Wang Ke (1995-2002)	Commander, Shenyang MR	Commander, Lanzhou MR
Fu Quanyou (1992-1995)	Commander, Lanzhou MR	Commander, Chengdu MR
Zhao Nanqi (1987-1992)	Deputy Director and Deputy Political Commissar, GLD	Political Commissar, Jilin Military District, Shenyang MR

Director, General Armament Department

A review of the career track for the PLA's four GAD directors since 1998, as shown in Figure 5, provides some indications of the qualifications required to become the next director. As can be seen, there is no specific pattern for selecting the GAD director. While Cao Gangchuan, who later became the Minister of National Defense and a CMC vice chairman, spent his career in the equipment/armament track, Li Jinai was a political officer, and Chen Bingde and Chang Wanquan were military/command track officers. Of particular note, no deputy directors of the GLD or GAD have become the director. The main reason for this is that, unlike the DCGS and GPD deputy director billets, the GLD and GAD deputy director billets are MR deputy leader-grade billets, not MR leader-grade billets, and their primary and secondary ranks are one and two stars. As a result, they would most likely not skip a grade to become the GLD or GAD director. As with every PLA rule, however, there are occasional exceptions. For example, one of the GAD deputy directors since 2001, Li Andong, was promoted to three stars during the July 2010 ceremony [8]. It is not clear what this promotion means for Li Andong's next assignment.

Figure 5: GAD Directors (1998-Present)

GAD Director	Previous Position	Previous Position
Cao	Director, CMC Military Trade Office	General Planning Division, Military Equipment Department, GSD
Li Jinai (2002-2003)	Political Commissar, COSTIND	Deputy Political Commissar, COSTIND
Chen Bingde (2004-2007)	Commander, Jinan MR	Commander, Nanjing MR
Chang Wanquan	Commander, Shenyang MR	Chief of Staff, Lanzhou MR

PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery Commanders

The situation is also complicated for the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery commanders. As shown in Figure 2, the grade for these three organizations is that of MR leader; however, the commander of each organization was designated a CMC member with the equivalent grade in 2004 [9].

As noted in Part 1, although the protocol order within the PLA for the three organizations is always Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery, the protocol order for the three commanders at the 16th and 17th Party Congress was based on their seniority as commanders.

According to the author's interviews with various PLA officials during meetings in Beijing, the reason for this is that the three commanders are CMC members based on a "policy promotion" (*zhengce shengji*), which is not an automatic promotion upon becoming the commander. As a result, they are listed by their individual seniority rather than their organization's protocol order. The fact that they are "policy promotion" CMC members may imply that they do not have the same authority as the directors of the four General Departments.

To replace the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery commanders as CMC members, their successors must first serve in an MR leader billet and have the rank of three stars. The three MR leader-grade billets that are logical stepping-stones for the PLAN and PLAAF commander position are DCGS, AMS commandant and NDU commandant. For example, Zhang Dingfa served as the AMS commandant from November 2002 until he became the PLAN commander in 2003 and CMC member in September 2004. Both Xu Qiliang and Wu Shengli served as a DCGS until they became their service's commander.

Second Artillery, which is an independent branch (*bingzhong*) rather than a service (*junzhong*) like the Army, Navy and Air Force, may have to delay placing Jing Zhiyuan's successor immediately on the CMC. As of now, no Second Artillery officers are in an MR leader-grade billet. Although Jing Zhiyuan became a CMC member in 2004, no Second Artillery officers have ever served as a deputy in any of the Four General Departments or as the commandant of AMS or NDU. The possibility exists, that Jing's successor, like Wu Shengli in 2006, will serve as the commander with the grade of MR leader for a period of time before being appointed as a CMC member.

Figure 6 provides information concerning Jing Zhiyuan's, Wu Shengli's and Xu Qiliang's path to the CMC member grade and three stars, which is helpful in illustrating the situation. Any possible successors must meet the grade, rank and age requirements to be eligible. This is particularly important because, in the PLA, one cannot skip a grade and must serve in a grade for a certain period before being promoted to the next grade.

Given their birth years, Jing will be required to retire at the time of the 18th Party Congress in 2012, while Wu and Xu will not be required to retire until at least the 19th Party Congress in 2017.

Conclusions

As noted, the purpose of this two-part series is to encourage China watchers to focus on the PLA's grade system rather than just the rank system. While promoting officers to three stars is an indicator of who might be

Figure 6: PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery
Commander Promotions

Officer	DOB	CMC Member	Commander	3 Stars	Previous Position
Jing Zhiyuan, Commander, Second Artillery & CMC member	1944	Sep 2004	Jan 2003	Sep 2004	Chief of staff, Second Artillery
Wu Shengli, Commander, PLAN & CMC member	1945	Oct 2007	Aug 2006	Jul 2007	DCGS
Xu Qiliang, Commander, PLAAF & CMC member	1950	Oct 2007	Oct 2007	Jul 2007	DCGS

assigned as the next cadre of leaders, the officers must apparently also meet certain time-in-grade requirements before moving to the next higher grade. This is especially important when trying to predict who will replace Jing Zhiyuan as the Second Artillery commander and when he will be appointed to the CMC. In addition, grade considerations are important in predicting who will be appointed as the next CMC vice chairmen and the Minister of National Defense. While the two-part series examines the grade and rank structure, it is still too early to definitively predict who will assume all of the key positions in 2012.

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Notes:

1. Since the PLA reintroduced ranks in 1988, the CMC has promoted 125 PLA and 4 People's Armed Police (PAP) officers to three stars in 17 ceremonies. From 1994 through 2006, ceremonies were held every two years. Special ceremonies have been held since 2004 for certain officers assuming CMC member- or MR leader-grade billets. During 2007-2009, four ceremonies were held, but for only 10 officers altogether.
2. Correspondence with Dr. Alice Miller on July 28, 2010.
3. In August 1982, Liu Huaqing became the third PLA Navy commander and a member of the CCP's 12th Central Committee. In January 1988, he replaced his Navy uniform with an Army uniform to begin the final phase of his military career in the CMC, where he eventually became the senior vice chairman. From 1992 to 1996, he also served as a member of the 10th CCP Central Committee's Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee.
4. See www.22826.com/question-109717182.html and http://mop.com/topic/main/readSubMain_10495434_0.html.
5. Correspondence and discussions with John Corbett on July 27, 2010.
6. Background information for all of the officers discussed in this series comes from their internet

biographies on *China Vitae* plus more detailed information from *Profiles of China Communist Party Central Committee Members from 1921-2003*, Chinese Communist Party School Press, October 2004.

7. The PLA has five officer career tracks: military/command, political, logistics, equipment/armament, and special technical.
8. Li Andong has served most of his career in equipment and armament-related billets within the GSD and then the GAD after it was formed in 1998. http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Li_Andong/career.
9. In 2004, the PLAN, PLAAF and Second Artillery commanders were appointed to the CMC as members. Zhang Dingfa and Jing Zhiyuan became the first PLAN and Second Artillery commanders to be appointed as CMC members; however, Qiao Qingchen was the third PLAAF commander to be a CMC member. The first PLAAF commander, Liu Yalou, was a CMC member from November 1956 to May 1965, and the fourth commander, Zhang Tingfa, was a member from August 1977 to September 1982. To further complicate the situation, the political commissar for the Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery—each of whom hold the grade of MR leader—are the Party Secretary for their respective organization's Party Committee, while the commanders serve as the deputy Secretary.
