

# CHINA BRIEF

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## Xi Jinping Presides Supreme Over Start of 19th Party Congress

China’s 19th Party Congress is now in full swing. On August 18, Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping started the once-every-five-years meeting with a sweeping party work report laying out his accomplishments and plans for the future. While the Congress will see important changes in key leadership posts, the work report acts as a capstone to the preceding five years.

Acknowledging the transformation of China underway and internal and external challenges facing the state, Xi presented his case that under his administration China has made important strides toward achieving the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People” (中华民族伟大复兴) ([Xinhua](#), October 18).

While the three-and-a-half hour, 30,000-Chinese-character speech will be distilled and digested for months to come, a few broad themes are worth highlighting.

A core part of Xi’s public image is his perception as a man of the people and champion of the countryside. This is not pure populism—rural poverty and growing social inequality are among the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) most pressing issues. In the run-up to

the Congress, hagiographic documentaries and books appeared discussing Xi's time as a "sent-down youth" (urban citizens and intellectuals sent to the countryside to learn from peasants). As General Secretary, Xi has made poverty alleviation (扶贫) a priority. The country currently suffers from rising inequality, particularly in the countryside. One reason for this is education gap between rural and urban areas. According to research by Stanford Universities' Rural Education Action Project, three-fourths of the country's young people lack a high-school education (CSIS, September 14). Nevertheless, as previewed at the annual Chinese Poverty Alleviation International Forum in May, the Chinese government intends to eradicate poverty by 2020 (*China Brief*, June 9). Xi's speech was peppered with references to the program and the success of "moving over 60 million people out of poverty...and reducing the incidence of poverty from 10.2 percent to less than 4" (*Xinhua*, October 18).

Based on the Party Work Report the CCP clearly views development, managing social unrest and emerging non-traditional security threats as priorities on par with traditional security issues, as embodied in the "Comprehensive National Security Outlook" (总体国家安全观). The underpinning idea "unifies development and security" and "external and domestic security" (*Xinhua*, October 18).

As frequently argued in this column, one noteworthy component of the "Outlook" is food security—ensuring sufficient domestic food supplies. Food security is emblematic of Xi's policies that link trade (such as grain imports from Russia), land reform (such as the

program to increase the size of farm plots for greater efficiency) and the environment (addressing China's soil toxicity problems) with broader concerns about the vulnerability of China's sea lines of communication (*China Brief*, [March 2](#); [July 1, 2016](#); [March 8, 2016](#)). Taken together, these policies will allow, in Xi's words "China to firmly grasp its rice bowl in its own hands" (*Xinhua*, October 18).

To ensure China's future growth it is not enough to address internal economic and environmental problems. Ensuring China's sea lines of communication are secure and growing China's trade abroad has led Xi to set ambitious goals for foreign policy and military reform.

While Xi's high-profile visits abroad may have lacked some of the novelty of Deng Xiaoping's first tours abroad in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Xi's shuttle diplomacy has the hallmarks of a mature power that his predecessors lacked. Befitting this new era in foreign relations, Xi's three major contributions—"Great Power Politics With Chinese Characteristics" (中国特色大国外交) and the "New Type Great Power Relations" (新型国际关系) and "One Belt One Road" (一带一路)—will continue to set the tone for the next five years. However, as Chinese promises of loans fail to materialize or partnerships sour, this is the aspect of Xi's legacy that is most likely in peril (*EDM*, June 6; *China Brief*, June 21, 2016).

Conversely, the military reforms announced at the end of 2015 will likely be a cornerstone of Xi's legacy. The formation of new theater commands, and the more recent "below the neck reforms" at the individual unit level can

fairly be described as “historic breakthroughs” ([Xinhua](#), October 18). While training and aspects of the People’s Liberation Army’s organizational structure continue to be barriers to greater effectiveness, Xi has laid the groundwork for achieving the “Dream of a Strong Military” (强军梦).

Though Western media tends to fixate on Chinese military developments, it is worth keeping in mind the most important strategic direction for the CCP is not North, South, East or West, but inward—maintaining its power and ensuring domestic stability.

This focus on domestic security has led China under Xi to develop the world’s largest surveillance state. Tested in China’s traditionally more restive minority regions in the west, surveillance cameras linked with artificial intelligence and “social credit” databases are being rolled out nation-wide ([China Brief](#), [July 21](#); [September 21](#)). After decades of theorizing about such a state under the rubric of “social management” (社会管理), the CCP appears to be on the brink of perfecting the modern panopticon ([China Brief](#), August 17).

China is deservedly proud of its modernization, economic wealth and scientific progress. The CCP is clearly focused on ensuring that it remains at the crest of the wave of power and influence it has ridden as China’s global power expanded after the Reform and Opening. China under Xi Jinping and the Party apparatus is clearly at its strongest point in several hundred years. Xi’s influence is such that his core ideology has been elevated to same status as that of Mao Zedong. Nevertheless, as Xi and his political allies continue to build

higher and higher walls it remains to be seen where the cracks will begin to emerge.

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## The Irresistible Rise of the “Xi Family Army”

By Willy Lam

Under President Xi Jinping, whose main power base is the People’s Liberation Army, the famous adage “power grows out of the barrel of a gun” has assumed added significance ([China Brief](#), [February 15, 2013](#); [January 9, 2015](#)). On the eve of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi has demonstrated his ironclad control over the PLA brass by filling a dozen-odd senior post with his protégés. Such large-scale personnel changes so close to the quinquennial congress are extremely rare in the tradition of the Party and army. The appointments seem to be Xi’s way of telling real and potential foes that nobody can challenge his status as “core leader” and “supreme military commander” (*zuigaotongshuai* – 最高统帅) due to his solid grip on the barrel of the gun.

Xi’s cobbling together a so-called “Xi’s Family Army” (*xijiajun* – 习家军) has followed in the wake of the ongoing comprehensive restructuring of the PLA command-and-control apparatus which began in December 2015 and January 2016. To celebrate the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Red Army, on July 30 Xi, who chairs the Central Military Commission (CMC), presided over a military parade in the Zhurihe Base in Inner Mongolia. Unlike such spectacles in the past, Xi was the

only Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member present. Also in a departure from tradition, former top leaders such as former presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were absent from the scene. Even the rhetoric of these highly scripted events was changed. Instead of addressing Xi as “leader” (*shouzhang* – 首长), troops being inspected gave him the more elevated title of “chairman” (*zhuxi* – 主席) (Voice of America, August 1; Phoenix TV, July 30). The core leader’s machinations just two months before the 19th Party Congress are geared toward asserting his authority in dictating personnel arrangements and other policies at the CCP conclave.

The recent spate of reshuffles at the PLA’s top echelons seems to be a precursor of large-scale personnel changes in the Party’s Central Committee, the Politburo and the PBSC. For the sake of further centralization of power, the membership of the CMC is expected to shrink from the usual ten or eleven to just five: one chairman and four vice-chairmen. This breaks with the long-standing tradition that the heads of the four major PLA divisions—the Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force and Rocket Forces—would be represented at the Commission. With Xi at the helm, the four vice-chairmen are expected to be the following veteran generals: incumbent Vice-Chairman Xu Qiliang (许其亮 – b. 1950); former director of the Equipment Development Department Zhang Youxia (张又侠 – b. 1950); former Rocket Forces Commander Wei Fenghe (魏凤和 – b. 1954); and newly promoted Chief of the General Chiefs Department Li Zuoucheng (李作成 – b.1953). General Xu, a Politburo member since 2012, will likely retain his position in the elite body. General

Zhang is deemed to have the highest chance of inheriting the Politburo slot left by the retiring CMC vice-chairman, General Fan Changlong (范长龙 – b. 1947) (Brookings.edu, September 19; Sing Tao Daily [Hong Kong], September 1).

Although not usually considered a member of the Xi Jinping Faction, Xu has earned Xi’s trust after professing his loyalty to the “core leader.” He will remain CMC Vice-Chairman for five more years. The former Air Force chief is expected to be put in charge of military reform, political discipline, and fighting corruption. Zhang Youxia, the former Director of the Equipment Development Department, is, like Xi, a princeling (offspring of party elders and senior cadres). He is the son of General Zhang Zongxun (张宗逊), who was a crony of Xi’s father, the late vice-premier Xi Zhongxun (习仲勋). General Zhang will be responsible for weapons modernization and logistics (Zaobao.com [Singapore], September 2; Sing Tao Daily, August 28). Wei Fenghe, a veteran of the former Second Artillery Forces has earned Xi’s respect for masterminding the modernization of China’s missiles. As a result, he was the first senior officer to have been conferred full general status by Xi after the latter became CMC Chairman in late 2012. A former commander of the Rocket Forces, Wei’s new mission will be to challenge the dominance of U.S. and Russia in missiles and space-related technology. General Li, a former commander of the Ground Forces, has



been repeatedly promoted in the past two years. The Chinese media noted that while Li was a much-decorated hero of the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979), he was passed over for promotion largely because he refused to bribe the underlings and cronies of the two corrupt former CMC vice-chairmen the disgraced General Guo Boxiong and General Xu Caihou. For example, it took Li ten years to advance from the position of Head of the then 41st Group Army (1998) to Vice-Commander of the then Chengdu Military Region (2008). And while Li became a major general in 1997, it took him 12 years to be elevated to Lieutenant-General. General Li will take charge of day-to-day military operations, including troop movements and other deployments within the five newly formed Theatre Commands. ([Dwnews.com \[Beijing\]](#), September 10; [Ming Pao \[Hong Kong\]](#), August 28; [Caixin.com](#), August 27; [Military.China.com](#), April 1, 2016).

An examination of promotions over the last two months throws the true nature of the 'Xi Army' into sharp relief. A disproportionately large number of these future top military leaders earned their spurs in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, where Xi served as a senior regional cadre from 1985 to 2007. Take, for example, the elevation of Han Weiguo (韩卫国 – b. 1956) as Commander of the Ground Forces, the appointment of Miao Hua (苗华 –

Recent High-Level PLA Promotions		
Position	Newly-Promoted Officers	Connections to Xi Jinping
Chief of Joint Staff Department	Li Zuocheng (李作成 – b. 1953)	Political foe of Xi's enemies, the disgraced former CMC vice-chairs Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou
Commander of the Ground Forces	Han Weiguo (韩卫国 – b. 1956)	Veteran Fujian-based officer, Head of the Xiamen-based 31st Group Army
Commander of the Navy	Shen Jinlong (沈金龙 – b. 1956)	Played large role in fighting graft in the navy
Commander of the Air Force	Ding Laihang (丁来杭 – b. 1957)	Served as Commander of the Air Force Command Post in Fuzhou
Commander of the Rocket Force	Zhou Ya'ning (周亚宁 – b. 1957)	Long-time deputy to former Commander Wei Fenghe, a trusted Xi protégé
Director of Strategic Support Dept.	Gao Jin (高津 – b. 1959)	Incumbent since 2015
Director of the Logistics Support Dept.	Song Puxuan (宋普选 – b. 1954)	Veteran of the former Nanjing MR, which covers Fujian and Zhejiang
Director of Equipment Development Dept.	Li Shangfu (李尚福 – b. 1958)	Elevation of the famous rocket-space expert reflects Xi's emphasis on beefing up hardware
Director of the Political Work Department	Miao Hua (苗华 – b. 1955)	Served in Fujian, a former political commissar of the Xiamen-based 31st Group Army
Director of the General Office of the CMC	Zhong Shaojun (钟绍军 – b. 1968)	Xi's trusted aide when worked in Zhejiang from 2002 to 2007

b. 1955) as Director of the Political Work Department, and the promotion of Ding Laihang (丁来杭 – b. 1957) as Air Force Commander. All three had worked in Fujian, where Xi served in various positions, including provincial governor, from 1985 to 2002. Gen. Han began his military career in Fujian and is a former Head of the Xiamen-based 31st Group Army (now the 73rd Group Army). Similarly, Miao Hua, a former political commissar of the Navy, is also a former political commissar of the 31st Group Army. And General Ding had served in a Fuzhou-based Air Force regiment ([Wen Wei Po \[Hong Kong\]](#), September 8; [Oriental Daily News \[Hong Kong\]](#), September 2; [Radio Free Asia](#), September 1; [China Times \[Taipei\]](#), August 29). Other Xi protégés elevated on the eve of the 19th Party Congress include Song Puxuan (宋普选 – b. 1954). A former Commander of the Northern Theater Command, General Song was named Director of the Logistics Support Department in early September. He is a former vice-commander of the now-defunct Nanjing Military Region

(MR), which included Fujian and Zhejiang provinces. The youngest rising star among the top brass, Zhong Shaojun (钟绍军 – b. 1968), who doubles as Director of the Office of the CMC Chairman as well as Vice-Director of the General Office of the CMC, was made Director of the CMC General Office, the PLA's nerve center in September. Zhong's rise can almost certainly be traced to a connection established when he was Xi's personal secretary when the latter was Party Secretary of Zhejiang from 2002 to 2007 ([Apple Daily \[Hong Kong\]](#), September 14; [South China Morning Post](#), September 13; [Dwnews.com](#), August 23).

The extraordinarily speedy elevation of General Han illustrates the lengths to which Xi has gone in reserving top spots for officers whose fealty is beyond doubt. Han was a vice-commander of the then Beijing MR when he was made Lieutenant-General in July 2015; seven months later he was appointed Commander of the Central Theater Command. The native of Hebei Province was made a full general on July 28, 2017; two days later he became the commander of the nationally televised Military Parade in Inner Mongolia that was presided over by President Xi. A week or so later, he replaced Li Zuocheng as Commander of the Ground Forces ([People's Daily](#), September 1; [South China Morning Post](#), September 1).

Supreme Military Commander Xi has also taken advantage of the proximity to the 19th Party Congress to weed out any "residual poison" (*yudu* – 余毒) left by his two arch enemies, the disgraced CMC Vice-Chairmen Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou. Fang Fenghui, a former commander of the erstwhile Beijing MR

and the first Chief of the Joint Staff, was unceremoniously sacked in the summer. The same was true of veteran political commissar and the first director of the Political Work Department Zhang Yang. Generals Fang and Zhang, who are under investigation for corruption, owe their illustrious careers at least partly to the patronage of Generals Guo and Xu. Given that Generals Guo and Xu were very close to former President Jiang Zemin, and that former president Hu Jintao largely went along with Jiang's personnel arrangements in the PLA, these personnel movements lend credence to the theory that Xi wants at the same time to minimize the residual influence of the two former presidents and CMC chairmen ([Bloomberg](#), September 6; [HK01.com](#), September 1).

Yet Xi has apparently disregarded military traditions and professional criteria (including the all-important grade system) by elevating so many of his cronies and protégés to top slots. Despite the apparent success of his one-and-a-half-year effort to streamline the command-and-control apparatus, Xi's personal ambition and his obsession of the loyalty of his aides has dealt a big blow to the PLA's professional standards. As is the case of human resources management in civilian sectors, the promotion of senior military staff is supposed to follow two principles: that members of the top brass should come from the proverbial "five lakes and four seas" and that they must be "red and expert." "Five lakes and four seas" refers to the imperative of factional, functional and geographical diversity; "red and expert" refers to the fact that while political loyalty is important, senior officers must have professional competence and notable

track records. As the paramount leader indicated is his book *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, "Good cadres are those who are conversant with politics and knowledgeable about their professions... who are both red and expert." (*Hebei Daily*, December 3, 2016; *People's Daily*, December 25, 2014).

The military media has disclosed that PLA anti-corruption authorities handled 4,000 cases of investigation in the past five years, as a result of which 14,000 officers were disciplined for graft and related crimes (*Ming Pao*, September 22; *Liberation Army Daily*, September 20). Despite President Xi's efforts to purge the ranks of corruption, disciplinary problems remain serious. A key reason for these problems in both civilian and military sectors, according to President Xi, is the prevalence of "factions and cliques" (*tuantuanhuohuo* – 团团伙伙) (*People's Daily*, March 22; *China News Service*, February 16, 2016). The extraordinary "helicopter rides" enjoyed by newly promoted Xi protégés such as Generals Han Weiguo and Zhong Shaojun, however, seem to be based on Xi's confidence in their loyalty rather than the latter's having demonstrated exemplary professional abilities. Despite the leaps-and-bounds modernization of weaponry, the dearth of professional standards in the armed forces could jeopardize Xi's goal of closing the military gap with the United States by 2049 at the latest.

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## Chinese and Indian Competition in Space Heats Up

Sudha Ramachandran

On May 5, India began a new diplomatic push in South Asia by launching the "South Asia satellite" into space. Built and launched by the government-run Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), the satellite will provide communications and meteorological data to India's South Asian neighbors (*Economic Times*, May 5 and *Xinhua*, May 5). [1] The satellite is an attempt to not only strengthen India's ties with its smaller neighbors and promote India-led regional co-operation but also to contain mounting Chinese influence in the region and countering its space co-operation with these countries.

China's influence in Sri Lanka has grown due to robust bilateral economic and defense ties (*China Brief*, May 15, 2015). Space collaboration has taken this co-operation to a higher level. In 2012, China put a commercial satellite into space for Sri Lanka (*The Island*, November 21, 2012). It is extending its Beidou Navigation Satellite (BDS) System to Sri Lanka and is setting up at least ten Continuously Oper-

ating Reference Stations there for this purpose ([China Daily](#), April 1). Having drawn Sri Lanka into its orbit, China is attempting to build additional space partnerships with Afghanistan, Nepal and the Maldives—much to Delhi's alarm ([The Hindu](#), March 21, 2013). In response, India has turned to space diplomacy to court neighbors and allies in East Asia. In Vietnam, India set up a dual civilian- and military- use satellite tracking and imaging center ([India Today](#), January 25, 2016).

At the height of the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union used money and weapons to build satellite states; today China and India are using satellites in space to win influence and secure their geo-political and economic interests. They see each other as competition in the global satellite launch business. So how do the Indian and Chinese space programs compare? In which areas is competition likely to be most intense?

## Background

China's space program began in the late 1950s and predates India's by at least a decade. Unlike India's space program, which was driven by development applications of space technology, China's program originated in military objectives. In 1993, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) was set up to co-ordinate the country's space activities.

India's space program had a humble beginning and continues to operate with very limited resources—the Organization for Economic and Social Development (OECD) estimates that India's annual space budget in

2013 was roughly \$1.2 billion compared to China's \$6.1 billion and the US' \$39.3 billion ([World Economic Forum](#), Jan 11, 2016; [Rediff](#), November 20, 2003).

Both programs benefited from co-operation with the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation. While such co-operation in the case of China was interrupted following the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, India's co-operation with Moscow has remained strong. Many of India's early milestones in space exploration were reached with Soviet help. A Soviet Cosmos-3M vehicle launched India's first satellite, Aryabhata, in 1975 and the first Indian to fly into space did so onboard a Soviet spacecraft in 1984.

## Major Milestones

Although China's space program is decades behind that of NASA, it is catching up. It has made "definitive progress," toward becoming "a major space power globally" ([Institute for Defense Studies & Analyses](#) (IDSA), January 6). Its first major milestone came in 1999 with the launch of Shenzhou-1, an unmanned craft. In 2003, when the first Chinese *taikonaut* entered space, China became the third country in the world to achieve this feat. China has since launched six manned space missions. In 2007, it shot down its own defunct weather satellite, displaying an anti-satellite (ASAT) capability. In 2011, CNSA launched a space lab, Tiangong-1, and followed that up with two robotic and two manned dockings with it. It made its first soft landing on the moon in December 2014. Although CNSA reportedly lost control over Tiangong-1 in 2016, it was able to launch another space station, the



Tiangong-2, a few months later. In April 2017, China launched its first unmanned cargo spacecraft.

China's fourth White Paper on its space activities, which was released in December 2016, provides a glimpse of its space agenda for the coming years. It plans to land a rover on the far side of the moon in 2018, which will be a global first, and an orbiter, a lander and rover on Mars by 2020. **[2]** Should its Mars mission succeed, China would be the second country after the US to accomplish this feat. It plans to operationalize its permanent space station by 2022, around when the ISS is due to retire ([Xinhua](#), June 8). However, the recent failed launch of a satellite by China's Long March-5 rocket could delay some of these plans ([Times of India](#), July 5).

As for India's space program, although it has been building satellites and launch vehicles since the 1970s, it was only with its successful mission to the Moon in 2008 that its space activities caught the world's attention. 'Chandrayaan-1's' landing on the moon made ISRO the fifth space agency in the world to land a spacecraft on the lunar surface. Then in 2014, ISRO's 'Mangalyaan' entered Mars' orbit, making it the fourth space agency to enter the Martian orbit, the first Asian agency to achieve this feat and the only one in the world to do so on its first attempt. In addition to being technology demonstrators, ISRO's Moon and Mars missions showcased Indian space successes on a limited budget ([Business Line](#), September 29, 2014). India has some high profile deep space missions planned, including a return to the Moon in 2018 and landing a rover on Mars by 2021–22.

## Racing Ahead

China's space program is ambitious and "advancing on a broad front," says noted Indian space analyst Ajey Lele. **[3]** Indeed, CNSA is making progress in a wide range of space activities including manned space flights, building and operating a space station, space science and planetary exploration. In contrast, ISRO's "focus is narrow. Space science, for instance, is not a priority for it," an ISRO official said. **[4]** CNSA's budget for space science is around \$110 million compared with India's \$43 million ([Live Mint](#), November 29, 2016).

China's program is significantly ahead of India's in several areas. Its robotic lunar exploration program, for instance, "is technologically and programmatically superior to India's ad hoc lunar and Mars robotic missions." India is "unable to challenge China's dominance in the robotic exploration of the Solar System," write Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan and Vidya Sagar Reddy of the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi ([Observer Research Foundation](#) (ORF), June 18, 2016).

India also trails China in developing indigenous navigation satellite systems. China's BeiDou system, which has been in use in China since 2000 and operational in the Asia Pacific region since December 2012, will be fully functional at the global level by 2020. China plans to provide basic services to countries that are part of its Belt and Road Initiative by 2018. Of the proposed 35 satellites for global navigation services, it has already put 23 in orbit ([China Daily](#), May 24). India's Navigation Indian Constellation (NavIC) is "far less ambitious" than Beidou. It comprises just seven

satellites and is only a regional system; coverage extends to about 1,500 km from the Indian landmass. It is expected to become fully operational soon. [5] Given Beidou's expansion to cover all BRI countries and several South Asian countries as part of the initiative, NAVIC may not draw many customers in the region. As with the space diplomacy contest, this round of the satellite navigation competition appears to have gone in China's favor.

### Looming Competition

India and China account for just 0.6 percent and 3 percent respectively of the \$6 billion global satellite launch services market, which is dominated by NASA and the European Space Agency (The Hindu, February 16). Indian space analyst Kartik Bommakanti notes that China has "superior space launch vehicle capabilities; it has bigger and more powerful rockets, and more satellite tracking stations and launch stations" than India. [6] This has contributed to CNSA's large and growing number of orbital launch missions. In 2016, China conducted 21 successful launches compared to NASA's 22 and ISRO's 7 (Space Flight 101, December 31, 2016). It plans to carry out 30 launches this year (Global Times, January 3).

Despite China's superior launch capabilities, Indian space analysts are optimistic. Bommakanti also notes that "In due course, India will be able to match the Chinese in launch vehicle capabilities, particularly with advances in the GSLV (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle) program and the reusable launch vehicle program". As for the satellite segment, "Indian capabilities do match even exceed

Chinese strength in terms of the quality of technology, if not the quantity of satellites." [7]

India's big advantage in the satellite launch business is "its reliable and cost-efficient launches especially for launching small satellites in the low earth orbit." [8] ISRO's record-breaking launch of 104 satellites in a single mission in February could bring down further the cost of launches (Hindustan Times, February 15). Its successful launch in June of the GSLV-Mk3, which has the capacity to carry 4 tons to the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO), is expected to open up markets for the launch of heavier satellites (Live Mint, June 15).

India's cost-effective space program has rattled China. Chinese space industry officials described ISRO's record-breaking satellite launch in February as "a wake-up call" for China. China would need to "reduce the cost of putting satellites into orbit" to expand its market share and had lessons to learn from India, they said (Global Times, February 20). Beijing is now expected "to fast-track the commercialization" of its satellite launches (Global Times, February 19).

Inefficiency in the state-run CNSA is said to have made its program among "the most expensive in the world." Privatization is expected to halve the cost of a Chinese satellite launch in the short-term and reduce it to a tenth in the long-run. This would make China "very competitive" in the global market (South China Morning Post, May 20, 2016). If CNSA's attempts to reduce costs are successful, Sino-Indian competition for share of the

global space launch market, especially for small and microsatellites will increase dramatically. This competition extends beyond diplomacy and economic competition—India and China both recognize the importance of space dominance to military competition.

### Conclusion

India and China are competing for markets, resources and influence on land and sea, especially in Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean. This competition is spilling over into outer space. China's space program is more advanced and extends over a larger range of activities than India's more focused program. China's better-funded space program is likely to keep it ahead in the Sino-Indian race in and over space. In the short term, Sino-Indian competition can be expected to deepen in the commercial satellite launch business. This competition is likely to intensify as more private players enter the space sectors of the two countries. Although India's focus on the military applications of space is certain to grow in the coming years, much will depend on its space collaboration with the U.S. Meaningful transfer of technology from the US to India would give the latter's military space program a strong boost but this could prompt China to accelerate its own military program further.

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### Notes

1. The 'South Asia satellite' will make space technology applications in telecommunication and broadcasting, disaster management, weather forecasting, telemedicine, tele-education and others available to India's neighbors.
2. "[Full Text: China's Space Activities in 2016](#)," The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, December 2016.
3. Ajey Lele, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and head of its Centre on Strategic Technologies, New Delhi, July 29.
4. Senior ISRO official, Bengaluru, August 14.
5. Ibid.
6. Kartik Bommakanti, Associate Fellow with the Strategic Studies Programme at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, July 29.
7. Ibid.
8. ISRO official, n.4.

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## Tigers in the Haze: Documenting Chinese Troops on the Border with North Korea in the "April Crisis"

By Adam Cathcart

While China is frequently assumed to have a number of "levers" it could use to control North Korea, in fact, its policies across the board—from security to economics—are much more limited. An examination of actions

in March and April 2017, when China was confronted with the destabilizing prospect of unilateral U.S. military action against North Korea, and apparently responded by taking more vigorous steps with Pyongyang, provides some useful insight. **[1]** China allegedly put bilateral economic projects on hold, threatened North Korea in the press with an oil embargo, and may have further captured Kim Jong-un's attention by mobilizing troops along its border with DPRK ([Global Times](#), April 12). North Korea complained, but backed down.

When documentation is scarce, claims of Chinese pressure in its various forms need to be sifted, weighed, and contextualized. Nowhere is this more true than in outside assertions about the posture and readiness of Chinese troops along the Sino-Korean border during periods of crisis.

As an intelligence and a signaling function dating back to the Korean War, the Chinese Communist Party has generally sought to mask specific military movements behind the Yalu and Tumen Rivers, while promoting an assumption in Washington, D.C., Tokyo and Seoul that Chinese strength in the border region was limitless, and that intervention could occur at any time. **[2]** Even in periods of political transition, the defense of the northeastern frontier has been a key function of the Chinese state, and the source of internal debate. **[3]** A reshuffle of PLA organizations during the "April crisis" and Xi Jinping's related personal orders to every military unit might, therefore, benefit from more inspection as both domestic and international political acts ([PRC Ministry of Defense](#)).

The conventional wisdom outside of the PRC today seems to assume that mobilizing troops near the border signals to North Korea that China is ready to either roll in or to block the flow of refugees into China. Too often, analysis which highlights assertions of Chinese mobilization in the border region ignore the signals already being sent by the Chinese military press (as opposed to Chinese foreign affairs periodicals) with respect to North Korea, and the documentation of open-source data on related Chinese military drills.

Finally, if China was, in fact, using troop movements to intimidate North Korea, how would we know a) that troop movements were in fact happening and b) that China intended them to impress DPRK?

### **Parsing Rumors**

Analysis of the rumors which spread in April about troop movements on the Chinese side of the border with North Korea provides some clarity about how to interpret these events. Confirming regular PLA activities in Jilin province in the month prior to the crisis places this information and misinformation surrounding these activities into the larger context of the role of the PLA and its posture toward North Korea in the changing environment.

On the Chinese side of the Tumen River valley, the atmosphere in April 2017 was both hazy and tense. The haze was literal—farmers around Yanbian were burning down the stumps of last year's corn crop, releasing nitrogen in the soil below and sending grey

plumes of smoke into the sky (*Yanbian Morning Post*, April 4).



Fires in PRC Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, April 14 2017. Photo: Adam Cathcart/SinoNK.com

For geopolitical tension, one only had to talk to some locals in Yanbian, or read a bit of the national press to understand why (*SCMP* April 23, 2017; *NBC*, April 13). Under the circumstances, the occurrence of air drills over the border city of Yanji—a commonplace occurrence—seemed to take on greater meaning (*Globe & Mail*, April 28).

As tends to happen at times of stress and tension on the peninsula, rumors began to circulate globally that Chinese troops were moving toward North Korea, reinforcing the frontier. The Japanese conservative newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* published a report on April 9 that there were 150,000 troops moving to the border; this report was then picked up and amplified by the conservative South Korean paper of record (*Chosun Ilbo*, April 10). More

dizzying third-hand reports that “about 25,000 troops of the Chinese military’s 47th Group Army of the Ninth Armored Brigade have been instructed to be ready to move long distances, close to the North Korea border” were subsequently generated in Hong Kong and passed along (*UPI*, April 12; for earlier, similar claims see *UPI*, November 11, 2016).

Nonetheless, the idea of a general Chinese military mobilization for crisis along the border spread further. In English, the *Business Insider* website was particularly successful in attracting web traffic by using questionable footage (which was itself at least a month old, and by no means certainly from the Shenyang region) to imply that troop movements were happening (*Business Insider*, April 14). News of troop movements was used as proof of the truth of the rumors, as were denials from the Russian Foreign Ministry (*Reuters*, April 21).

Outlets trafficking in disinformation seemed keen to portray the rumor as hard evidence that Donald Trump’s pressure on Xi Jinping (at Mar-a-Lago and the tweets that followed) had finally brought China around to threatening force against North Korea. **[4]** Anonymous U.S. officials actually encouraged rumors of Chinese mobilization for conflict and went so far as to indicate China had changed its posture along the border with North Korea (*CNN*, April 20).

Denials of these rumors were issued by Chinese officials at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the PLA, but other information circulating around the Chinese internet indicated that



the government was mobilizing bureaucracies in border cities for a nuclear test or a North Korean collapse ([Guancha](#), April 27).

So what were the facts?

### Official PRC Media Sources

Chinese military media itself provides a useful baseline. These often include formal denials from PLA spokespersons that at least acknowledge the awareness of the Chinese state of a sort of externally generated hysteria. A less frequently used approach is to examine military drills by the units concerned. In the case of the spring, such reports exist about drills for military preparedness in Jilin province. [5] These are not reliable sources of information about PLA border troop strength and posture, but these can help gauge if such actions were intended as a signal to North Korea, and indicate state attention to overall readiness. Movements of People's Liberation Army troops near the North Korean border are a closely held secret. Equally important is the fact that these limited number of publicly available official sources are also available to North Korean observers, particularly the DPRK Consulate in Shenyang and the Embassy in Beijing.

### Jilin Military Drills

What is known is that from March 22 to 28 military drills took place outside of Jilin City in an area of 15 square kilometers of hilly and rocky woodlands, called Dongman Fengshan. Military press releases indicated action took place in "unfamiliar terrain" of plains, hills, and forests. While China will occasionally carry out

publicized military drills of small-scale directly on or just adjacent to the North Korean border, it should be noted that these March drills took place over 100 kilometers from the DPRK's borders (for coverage of small drills in Tumen in July, see [China News](#), July 7).

A close read of the most extensive report on the drills does not necessarily tell us much: There is little sense of how many troops participated, and in the press releases the actions feel more like an exercise in morale building ([China Armed Police Net](#), March 24; [China News – Jilin](#), March 23). The troops went through a simulated "contaminated area" (染毒区), putting in 18-hour days wearing packs weighing 30 jin (half a kilogram). "There is no runner-up in war," one press release reminded readers, while also noting that soldier had an outbreak of hemorrhoids—indicating there was no room for weakness on the battlefield.

Strangely, in the hothouse atmosphere of international reporting on North Korea, some coverage of the drills which was written purely in military commissar style was appropriated and used as evidence of threats toward North Korea. One member of the unit conducting drills said with emotion, "As we step onto the battlefield, we really must think that we are more complete than the enemy, that we understand the laws of war more clearly than the enemy, that we will shoot faster than the enemy, that we are more prepared, so that we are utterly victorious over the enemy, no shame!" ([Jilin News Net](#), March 23). The U.K. newspaper *Daily Star* promptly reported the drills as a signal to North Korea ([London Daily](#)

*Star*, March 29).\_ If every drill with such language in Jilin were a signal to North Korea, then 'devil week' drills in the province in August 2016 and every other drill would require similar interpretation (China News Network, August 23, 2016).

### Evaluating Exercises

China has published on other border issues that provide insight and reflection on the Korean case: the Chinese military press in these cases has gone to great effort to explain their motivations. This should make us cautious when ascribing signaling elsewhere when it is not similarly backed up in official press. *Defense Times* (*Guofang Shibao*; 国防时报) provided precisely such an essay with respect to another cross-border ally-cum-adversary, Myanmar, less than a week after the drills in Jilin concluded (*Defense Times*, April 3).

Published on April 3, *Defense Times* published an article sourced from *Phoenix News*, a Hong-Kong-based pro-mainland news outlet which has been used in the past to message for the CCP. It described in exquisite detail the type of signaling cross-border military drills were intended to send to potential adversaries—in this case, Myanmar. Reading a March 28 Xinhua dispatch on combined drills of PLA Marines, Air Force, and border guards, and artillery, the piece amounted to the analysis that the foremost purpose of the drills was "to intimidate (震慑) the other side...including the Myanmar government, army, its 'courageous troops' and militia." The other purpose of the drills was to rehearse a possible counterattack over the border, and to boost the morale of the Chinese border-area

citizens (边民) who had been frightened due to the cannon fire (sounds) from the other side of the border. Drills were also intended to "block refugees" (阻隔难民) from coming over the border. But in parallel to these intimidating acts, the article stated, was an explicit warning from the Chinese side, clear military-military coordination so the drills did not set off a crisis on the other side.

One final noteworthy instance of misinformation was found shortly after the drills, but in the Chinese military press. In late March, the *Defense Times* published a purported summary of a Western researcher's *Foreign Policy* article describing how the PLA planned to "block" U.S. military access to Pyongyang in the advent of a North Korean collapse (*Defense Times*, March 31). The article seemed to offer a US-sourced vision that China would and could roll down the Korean Peninsula and again stop a U.S. advance, holding to the gains of the Mao years and preventing a repeat of the trajectory of the first Korean War. However, the *Defense Times* article was in fact based upon a single interview with Stratfor by the *Business Insider* website (*Business Insider*, March 16).

### Conclusion

Personal experience is one flawed but important way to assess the broader environment in Chinese border regions. I was in the Chinese border region across from North Korea from April 8–18, and spent a couple of hours in Tumen in discussion with PLA border guards and ethnic Korean plainclothes police. I can therefore confirm other accounts that border security was tighter than usual in that

period and that the PLA in Tumen had orders to keep “third-country nationals” (i.e., people who were not Chinese or North Koreans) at least 100 meters from the border as a whole. Border guards were also tasked with the prevention of photographs being taken of the North Korean side. It seemed clear that no foreigner on the ground was going to be able to get a sense of China’s military muscle near the border. Nor was the Chinese news media going to report on it.

Around Longjing, the lack of roadblocks along key crossings and avenues of advance also casts doubt on the idea that broader operations were ongoing. In the future, similar confirmation of real facts on the ground will likely be even more difficult, as the national anti-spy campaign is not going to make legitimate foreign reporting or academic fieldwork in the border region any easier (*Xinhua-bao wang*, April 18). Did Chinese troops truly flood the border region during the “April crisis” to the tune of 150,000 troops? We have no way of knowing, based upon press reports or personal experience. But the signaling in the press had its purposes.

Questions of information quality ought to figure high among our concerns during this analytical process—observers of this issue need to filter out what was legitimate intelligence and data, and which “events” were, in fact, propaganda meant to confuse.

A few axioms may be useful for understanding the border research environment:

- Chinese reports from the border region during tense periods are few

and far between, and generally not helpful.

- First-hand accounts on the border during a crisis is only marginally more useful, but are better than official reporting. Talking to journalists and reading their reports is useful in this respect. The new counter-espionage campaign will likely make this more difficult.
- The Chinese military press tends to be more abundant than we give it credit for, but needs to be read more widely and carefully.
- Statements from the PRC Foreign Ministry and Global Times newspaper are of very limited use.
- Statements by some academics are useful as signaling.
- There may be far less drama than we imagine; Consider the possibility that DPRK has been informed of military movements by the PRC side, making them less threatening.

Chinese reports from the border region, when they do emerge are tightly controlled and rarely move much beyond Xinhua copy (*Huanqiu*, April 27). Part of the reason that rumors spread is that China itself maintains such a grip on the narrative, and does not allow domestic reports. Adding to the ostensible weight of any dispatch filed from the border region was the fact that, with a few exceptions, Chinese reporters were themselves forbidden from covering anything related to North Korea.

At the apex of the worries of war between the US and North Korea, precisely one report was

filed from the outskirts of Tumen city, where a sheep breeder had suffered huge losses due to nighttime attacks from an endangered species of northeastern tiger (*Yanbian Morning Post*, April 14). This was a kind of an alternate reality, having nothing to do with border guards or international conflict. Had the farmer's sheep been plundered by hungry North Korean border guards, the very forces known for stealing farm animals from the communities downriver? No, rather, it appeared to be a rare instance of a Northeastern Tiger (Dongbei hu) shredding sheep in the early morning haze.

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## Notes

1. The argument that Chinese pressure in Pyongyang was working was made by several Western journalists: John Everard, "Trump's North Korea policy might just be working," CNN, April 20, 2017; Kelly Mclaughlin, "China 'deploys 150,000 troops to deal with possible North Korean refugees over fears Trump may strike Kim Jong-un following missile attack on Syria'," *Daily Mail* online/Reuters, April 10, 2017,

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4399076/China-deploys-150-000-troops-North-Korea-border.htm>

2. Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu* (New York: Macmillian, 1960), pp. 64-67; Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War, Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 738-745; see also Robert Rigg, *Red China's Fighting Hordes* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing, 1952).
3. Dai Maolin, *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dongbeiju, 1945-1954* (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin Chubanshe, 2017).
4. For examples of disinformation or poorly sourced reporting see: Tyler Durden, "China Threatens To Bomb North Korea's Nuclear Facilities If It Crosses Beijing's "Bottom Line" Zero-Hedge, Apr 12, 2017; Alex Jones, "North Korea Backs Down in Nuclear Showdown with Trump," *Infowars*, April 14, 2017. ; Jack Posobiec, "Inside Trump's deal with China on North Korea," *The Rebel Media*, April 28, 2017.
5. Liaoning, the other province with an extended border with North Korea, is another matter for investigation, see Adam Cathcart and Adam Cathcart, citation of PSB materials in Liaoning, 'Evaded States'

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## Alternative Models for the Central Military Commission

By Phillip C. Saunders

The Chinese Communist Party's 19th Party Congress, which starts on October 18th, will make major changes to the membership of key Party organs such as the Politburo (and the Politburo Standing Committee), the Central Committee, and the Central Military Commission (CMC) as older leaders retire, others are promoted or transferred to different positions, and new leaders are appointed. Within the People's Liberation Army (PLA), many of these personnel moves have already been made, such as the announcement in late August that General Li Zuocheng, current PLA Army commander, has replaced General Fang Fenghui as Director of the CMC Joint Staff Department.

In addition to changing which individuals occupy key positions, the Party Congress also provides an opportunity to adjust the structure of the CMC to match the PLA's post-reform organizational structure and the changes in responsibilities of the senior officers who lead different parts of the PLA. There are four likely models for a restructured CMC (a "status quo plus" CMC; an enlarged CMC; an operational CMC; and a management CMC), each with respective pros and cons. Decisions about how to restructure the CMC will provide new evidence about Chinese priorities, the relative influence of different parts of the PLA (and the officers chosen to lead those parts), and the state of civil-military relations in China.

The CMC is the supreme national organ in charge of military and defense affairs. Its major functions include formulation of military strategy, handling contingencies, building effective military forces, coordination of military, economic, political, and diplomatic strategies, and formulating military guidelines and policies. [1] Despite this consistent mission, the size and structure of the CMC have varied widely over the years, adapting to new strategic and political contexts. Party Congresses and associated plenums have typically been the occasion for major decisions on the CMC's structure and membership.

In 2016, the PLA embarked on a major organizational restructuring that converted seven army-dominated Military Regions into five joint Theater Commands; removed the operational command role of the services and gave them "plan, train, and equip" responsibilities; and converted the four stand-alone general departments into parts of a reorganized CMC staff (China Brief, [February 4, February 23](#)). This restructuring was accompanied by extensive transfers of senior officers to lead the reorganized CMC departments, the services, and the theater commands. [2]

Despite this major organizational restructuring, there have been no changes to the formal membership of the CMC itself (see Table 1). Admiral Wu Shengli remains a CMC member, even though he has been replaced as commander of the PLA Navy by Shen Jinlong. Current CMC members Fang Fenghui and Zhang Yang are reportedly under investigation and are not included in the list of PLA delegates to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, but have not been



removed from their CMC positions. General Li Zuocheng was named commander of the PLA Army (newly established as a separate service), but has not been made a member of the CMC, even though the commanders of the other services have that status. This reflects the practice of having CMC appointments be made by the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Pre-Reform Title</b>	<b>Post-Reform Title</b>	<b>Replacement</b>
Xi Jinping (习近平)	Chairman	Chairman	
Fan Changlong (范长龙)	Vice Chairman of the CMC	Vice Chairman of the CMC	
Xu Qiliang (许其亮)	Vice Chairman of the CMC	Vice Chairman of the CMC	
Chang Wanquan (常万全)	Minister of National Defense	Minister of National Defense	
Fang Fenghui (房峰辉)	Chief of the General Staff Department (GSD)	Director, CMC Joint Staff Department	Li Zuocheng (李作成)
Zhang Yang (张阳)	Director, General Political Department (GPD)	Director, CMC Political Work Department	Miao Hua (苗华)
Zhao Keshi (赵克石)	Director, General Logistics Department (GLD)	Director, CMC Logistic Support Department	Song Puxuan (宋普选)
Zhang Youxia (张又侠)	Director, General Armaments Department (GAD)	Director, CMC Equipment Development Department	Li Shangfu (李尚福)
Wu Shengli (吴胜利)	Commander, PLA Navy	Commander, PLA Navy	Shen Jinlong (沈金龙)
Ma Xiaotian (马晓天)	Commander, PLA Air Force	Commander, PLA Air Force	Ding Laihang (丁来杭)
Wei Fenghe (魏凤和)	Commander, Second Artillery Force	Commander, PLA Rocket Force	Zhou Yaning (周亚宁)

Political considerations that may influence the structure of the CMC include:

- The imperative for the CCP to maintain control of the PLA and the desire to strengthen subjective and objective control mechanisms over the military. **[3]**
- Xi's desire to centralize decision-making in his hands and not delegate major decisions, known as the Chairman responsibility system.
- The initial reforms provided jobs for all PLA senior officers to reduce potential opposition to reform. We may see changes to the grades of organizations and office-holders commanders as incumbents retire or transfer and are replaced by younger officers.

Operational considerations that may influence the structure of the CMC include:

- The right representation and expertise to offer good advice on high-level strategic/military decisions.
- Xi Jinping's practical need to limit the time he personally devotes to military decisions.
- A membership that reflects the logic of PLA restructuring (e.g. new roles of services, theaters, and CMC departments) and a grade structure compatible with other parts of the PLA.
- Supporting a logical career progression that will give future senior PLA leaders the right mix of joint, operational, and staff experience.
- Potentially reduce size to improve decision-making speed.

### Alternative Models for a Restructured CMC

*A "Status Quo Plus" CMC:* keep two military vice-chairs and Minister of National Defense, keep service commanders (and add the Army commander), and keep new heads of former general departments (which are now CMC departments).

This has the advantage of being closest to the existing CMC structure, and therefore being the easiest to implement. It would also represent the views of both the operational parts of the PLA (including the heads of the former general departments) and the services (with their army-building functions).

However, it would not necessarily match the political intent of the PLA reorganization (including the desire to rein in the power of the general departments, which were viewed as independent kingdoms that were vulnerable to corruption and which needed more supervision).

*An Enlarged CMC:* keep two military vice-chairs and Minister of National Defense, keep service commanders (and add the Army commander) and heads of former general departments; and add the five theater commanders.

This has the advantage of making the CMC a venue to reconcile operational demands (via participation of theater commanders and former general department heads) and army-building requirements (via service chiefs).

However, this enlarges the CMC significantly (which would slow decisions) and includes members who have three different grades in

the current system (theater commanders are grade three, while most CMC members are grade two and the CMC vice-chairs are grade one).

*An Operational CMC:* remove heads of former general departments and service chiefs from CMC; build a smaller CMC focused on operational command and control. This model might retain the head of the CMC Joint Staff Department (which has an operational command role) and potentially add the Commanders of the Strategic Support Force and the Joint Logistics Support Force (which both have significant operational responsibilities).

This has the advantage of creating a smaller, more agile CMC that is better equipped to exercise operational control of joint forces and supervise the theater commands in wartime and contingencies.

A major drawback is that a smaller, operationally focused CMC would not have the right representation to perform the CMC army-building and strategic advice functions. The services and former general department heads would use this need to argue for their continued membership on the CMC.

*A Management CMC:* keep service commanders (and add the Army commander), remove the heads of former general departments, and reallocate supervisory responsibilities across the CMC vice-chairs (and possibly add a civilian vice-chair or give the Minister of Defense more responsibility). The CMC vice-chairs (and possibly an empowered Minister of Defense) would divide the operational, political, equipment, and logistics portfolios and

have de facto supervision of the relevant former general department heads, who could be reduced in grade. The CMC General Office Director might be added as a CMC member to represent the views of all the CMC departments.

This has the advantage of making the CMC smaller (and thus better able to reach decisions) and reducing the influence of the former general department heads (and thus their ability to function as “independent kingdoms”). Empowering the Minister of Defense or adding a civilian vice-chair could significantly enhance civil-military integration, which is one of the major goals of the PLA reforms.

However, this model would substantially downgrade the role of the Director of the Joint Staff Department, who currently supervises operations and interacts regularly with foreign military leaders. (The CMC vice-chair with the operational portfolio might pick up these responsibilities.) This model would also empower the CMC vice-chairs, which could cut against the political goal of centralizing responsibility in the CMC Chairman’s hands and tightening CCP control over the military.

### **Other Considerations**

There is a historical pattern of appointing the political successor to the CCP General Secretary to a civilian CMC vice-chair position two or three years before the successor takes over as General Secretary and Chairman of the CMC. Will Xi appoint a successor? Would the need to supervise the military provide a justification for Xi to stay on as general secretary

and/or CMC chair after his two terms as General Secretary are over?

The Strategic Support Force is not a full service and has an operational support role rather than an operational warfighting function. Its director, therefore, might not be qualified for CMC membership.

The Minister of Defense has historically not had a major operational or military decision-making role. Could this change given the reform’s emphasis on civil-military integration? Could the Ministry of Defense take on more responsibility for weapons development, research and development, mobilization, and other areas that require interaction with other parts of the Chinese government and civilian industry? Alternatively, could a third CMC vice chair (possibly civilian) take on these roles? Many of these functions are now the responsibility of individual CMC departments or CMC commissions; having a senior PLA officer in charge of all them could improve coordination with the government and industry.

Will the former general departments be reduced to theater commander-grade organizations and their directors denied seats on the CMC? This would reduce their influence as “independent kingdoms,” but it might be difficult to downgrade the status of the Director of the Joint Staff Department.

The CMC General Office is listed first in protocol rank on the CMC staff. Does this qualify the Director of the General Office for CMC membership? Could the General Office Director be the sole CMC department head with CMC membership?

This analysis has focused on potential changes to the membership of the CMC rather than the equally important (but much harder to predict) question of which individual officers will be selected to fill which positions. Assessments of the capabilities, personal loyalty, and political reliability of individual officers may determine both which senior positions they are assigned to and what responsibilities are given to those positions.

## Conclusion

China is almost certain to make at least modest changes in the membership of the CMC at the Party Congress, and the possibility of more dramatic changes cannot be ruled out. The most likely outcome is a *"status quo plus"* CMC with the addition of the PLA Army commander. This would be the least disruptive change, but would not fully adapt the CMC to meet the objectives of the PLA reforms. An *enlarged CMC* would be too unwieldy and an *operational CMC* would not be able to fulfill all the CMC's responsibilities, so these options are unlikely. A *management CMC* that reduces the size of the CMC and empowers the CMC vice-chairs might be better adapted to the PLA's new organizational structure and to the goal of increasing civil-military integration, but would require Xi Jinping to have great confidence in the personal loyalty and political reliability of the CMC vice-chairs.

Whatever structure China ultimately chooses will provide some insight into CCP and PLA priorities, the relative influence of different parts of the PLA (and the influence of the individuals chosen to command those parts),

and the state of civil-military relations in China.

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## Notes

1. Tai Ming Cheung, "The Riddle in the Middle: China's Central Military Commission in the Twenty-First Century," in Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policy-making* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 89.
2. See Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, China Strategic Perspectives 10 (March 2017).
3. This distinction is from Samuel Huntington. Subjective control mechanisms attempt to ensure that the military will obey because it has the same political values and beliefs as civilians; objective control mechanisms are intended to ensure compliance by effectively monitoring military behavior.

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