

# China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012 (Part 3: Military Leaders)

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The PRC's civilian-military relationship has always been a central concern among China watchers. Although the political leadership's control over the military has not been challenged in the last two decades, several factors—a possibly ineffective civilian collective leadership, growing social tensions and public protests, and China's great power aspirations amid a rapidly changing global environment—may all enhance the military's influence and power in the years to come. The upcoming political succession in 2012 is expected to involve a large-scale turnover in both the civilian and military leadership. Based on in-depth analysis of the PRC's 57 currently highest-ranking military officers, this essay aims to address the following important questions: Who are the most likely candidates to become the military's top leadership at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress? What are the group characteristics of these rising stars in the Chinese military? What can an analysis of the professional backgrounds and political networks of China's top officers reveal about the new dynamics between civilian and military elites and the possible challenges that lie ahead?\*

No systematic analysis of the upcoming leadership transition in China is complete without an in-depth exploration of the current status and likely change of top military elites.<sup>1</sup> Like authoritarian regimes elsewhere, China's civilian leaders must have military support, in this case from the leadership of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), in order to reach the pinnacle of power. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that military elites in China are able to serve as "kingmakers." Quite the contrary, in the absence of a military strongman in today's China, no PLA leader is able to play such a role. In the post-Deng era a firm consensus has held among Chinese political elites that the military, on the whole, should preoccupy itself with the country's national defense and leave domestic politics to civilians. The Chinese military, however, remains a very important interest group in the country. The PLA's need to advance its own bureaucratic interests makes the Chinese military, collectively and on an individual basis, an influential powerbroker that may carry enormous weight in Chinese politics generally and especially in CCP leadership transitions.

Equally important, senior members of the PLA have tended to represent a significant portion of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Of the 371 members of the 17<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee formed in 2007, for instance, members of the military leadership occupied 65 seats (18 percent).<sup>2</sup> Military elites therefore constitute a major subgroup within this important decision-making body, reason enough to pay

close attention to their various attributes and political roles. Moreover, as there will be substantial turnover in the military leadership at the next CCP national congress in 2012, it is incumbent upon us to finely analyze the military leadership's internal dynamics, especially as the upcoming succession may have broader implications for Chinese politics.

Table 1 lists all 10 current military members of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the ultimate decision-making body for Chinese military affairs. Based on the expected mandatory retirement birth year for the next Central Committee of the CCP (1944), we can predict with a fair degree of confidence that seven members—including the two vice chairmen of the CMC, General Guo Boxiong (born in 1942) and General Xu Caihou (b. 1943) and Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie (b. 1940)—will retire. The three members of the CMC likely to remain, General Chang Wanquan (b. 1949), Admiral Wu Shengli (b. 1945), and General Xu Qiliang (b. 1950), are the leading candidates to replace them.

**Table 1**

*Current Military Members of the Central Military Commission and Their Career Prospects after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012.*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Current post</i>	<i>Year born</i>	<i>Age in 2012</i>	<i>Likely status after 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress</i>
Guo Boxiong	CMC Vice Chair; Politburo Member	1942	70	Retired
Xu Caihou	CMC Vice Chair; Politburo Member	1943	69	Retired
Liang Guanglie	CMC Member; Minister of Defense; State Councilor	1940	72	Retired
Chen Bingde	CMC Member; Chief of General Staff	1941	71	Retired
Li Jinai	CMC Member; Director, General Political Dept.	1942	70	Retired
Liao Xilong	CMC Member; Director, General Logistics Dept.	1940	72	Retired
Chang Wanquan	CMC Member; Director, General Armament Dept.	1949	63	Promoted to CMC Vice Chair, Politburo Member
Jing Zhiyuan	CMC Member; Commander, 2nd Artillery Corps	1944	68	Retired
Wu Shengli	CMC Member; Commander, Navy	1945	67	Promoted to CMC Vice Chair, Politburo Member
Xu Qiliang	CMC Member; Commander, Air Force	1950	62	Promoted to CMC Vice Chair, Politburo Member

NOTES: CMC = Central Military Commission; Dept. = Department.

The newcomers that will fill the vacancies in the next CMC will concurrently occupy all of the most important posts in the military, including the directorships of the PLA's four Central Departments (Chief of the General Staff, General Political Department,

General Logistics Department, and General Armament Department), and the commandships of three major services (the Air Force, Navy, and 2nd Artillery Corps). In addition, a group of younger PLA officers, most in their 50s or late 40s, will join the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP and occupy the next tier of senior military leadership posts. This upcoming transition of the PLA representatives of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress will likely represent the largest turnover in Chinese military leadership in over two decades.

## The Importance of the PLA in China's Domestic and Foreign Affairs

This upcoming military transition will occur at a trying time for China. The country is not only witnessing important changes in the domains of leadership politics and socioeconomics, but is also facing daunting challenges on both the domestic and international fronts. There are three factors whose examination will help to highlight the growing importance of the military in the Chinese political life.

First, the civilian control of the Chinese military presently rests on the shoulders of CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao, owing to his position as chairman of the CMC. Apart from Hu, no other civilians sit on the CMC. The much-anticipated appointment of Vice President Xi Jinping to be civilian vice chairman of the CMC, a crucial step along the way to Xi succeeding Hu as CCP General Secretary in 2012, has still not taken place. Although Xi may indeed assume the position of vice chairman of the CMC this fall, and succeed Hu as party chief in 2012, he will most likely be seen as a weak leader without charisma, a solid base of power, or major accomplishments. Although Xi is the only prominent civilian leader in the upcoming fifth generation with some military experience, having served as a *mishu* (personal secretary) to former Minister of Defense Geng Biao from 1979 to 1982, this does not translate to real credibility with the military leadership. Meanwhile, other rising civilian stars have even fewer credentials when it comes to military affairs.

Second, political tensions are on the rise throughout the country. This is due to a variety of factors, including stark economic disparities, rising employment pressures, concerns over environmental degradation, public-health crises, high-profile instances of social injustice, a recent surge in ethnic conflicts, and most generally, disorientation associated with China's painful search for its new global role in a rapidly changing world. The emerging Chinese middle class, often considered to be a political ally of the ruling Communist Party, have become increasingly critical of the government for policies that undermine their interests.<sup>3</sup> Recently proposed initiatives that would tax urban housing will, if adopted, surely further anger this important socioeconomic force. Members of the middle class are also resentful over official corruption and the state's monopoly of major industries. Furthermore, protests by migrant laborers, often perceived to be second- or third-class citizens in China, as well as strikes by urban workers, will most likely occur more frequently and on a larger scale in the years to come. The People's Armed Police (PAP), a special paramilitary force under the direction of the CMC and the State Council, has frequently been called on to maintain stability during various crises in recent years. As the PLA has not had to fight an external war for a long

time, crackdowns on domestic riots and participating in natural disaster relief efforts seem to have become their most important missions. This, in turn, has also enhanced the military's standing and influence in domestic affairs.

Third, in recent years Chinese military elites have played an increasingly active role in the public discourse surrounding China's foreign and defense policies. Senior PLA officers have recently commented in public on issues such as the United States' recent sale of weapons to Taiwan, the Chinese claim that the disputed islands in the South China Sea represent a "core national interest" of the PRC, and the recent tensions on the Korean Peninsula over the sinking of a South Korean warship. This seems to indicate that PLA strategists have succeeded in broadening their audiences, and may better reflect the nationalistic strain of Chinese public sentiment than those in the foreign-policy establishment.<sup>4</sup> The 2010 best-seller, *The China Dream*, written by Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu, director of the Institute of Military Development of the National Defense University (NDU), explicitly argues that China should pursue a new development strategy of "military rise" (*junshi jueqi*) to obtain and secure a global leadership position from which it can compete with the United States.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Chinese authorities did not prevent the publication of this provocative book as they had with similarly provocative works by military officers in the past. Quite the contrary: Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou, commissar of the NDU and a confidant of Jiang Zemin, even wrote a foreword for the book. As China continues, or perhaps even accelerates, its already enormous military buildup—a key pillar of which is construction of a blue-water navy with Chinese-made aircraft carriers able to secure China's "energy and resource supply"—military leaders will likely continue to gain influence and power in China's foreign policy process.

## An Empirical Analysis of the PRC's Top 57 Military Officers

This study examines the biographical backgrounds, professional experiences, and processes of political socialization of the PRC's current 57 highest-ranking military leaders. This group includes all of the military members of the CMC; all of the directors, commissars, and deputy directors of the four general departments of the PLA; the director of the General Office of the CMC; the director of the Bodyguards Bureau of the CCP Central Committee; all commanders and commissars of the Air Force, Navy, 2nd Artillery Corps, and People's Armed Police; all commanders and commissars of the seven greater military regions (Beijing, Shenyang, Lanzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Chengdu); and all commandants and commissars of the three major military academies (the NDU, Academy of Military Sciences, and Defense Science and Technology University).

Table 2 shows the 17<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee membership status of these senior military officers. A total of 34 are full members, including the two Politburo members Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou. Another 10 are alternate members of the Central Committee. Altogether they constitute 68 percent of the 65 total military members of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee. Most of the nine officers who are currently members of neither

the CCP Central Committee nor the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection are younger rising stars of the PLA, including Lt. General Hou Shusen (b. 1950), deputy chief of the General Staff; Du Jincai (b. 1952), deputy director of the General Political Department; and Lt. General Liu Fulian (b. 1953), commissar of the Beijing Military Region (MR). They will most likely secure membership in this important leadership body in 2012.

**Table 2**

*Current Top Military Leaders' Membership in the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (as of June 2010)*

<i>Membership Status</i>	<i>Number of Leaders</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Politburo member	2	3.5
Full member	32	56.1
Alternate member	10	17.5
Member of CCDI	4	7
None of the above	9	15.8
Total	57	100.0

Notes: CCDI = Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

*Age, Education, Birthplace, and Career*

Table 3 (next page) presents a breakdown of the biographical and professional backgrounds of these top 57 military leaders. With the exception of seven CMC members who were born before 1944 and therefore must vacate their seats after 2012, the officers in this study were all born after 1945 and will avoid retirement for the next few years. Almost 40 percent were born in the 1950s. The three youngest leaders are: Major General Gu Junshan (b. 1956), deputy director of the General Logistics Department; Major General Liu Sheng (b. 1956), deputy director of the General Armament Department; and Lt. General Zhang Yulin (b. 1958), commandant of the Defense Science and Technology University. Both Liu and Zhang hold Ph.D.'s in engineering (from the Northwestern University of Engineering and Zhejiang University, respectively). Both have extensive work experience in the fields of aerospace and missile technology. Zhang also pursued post-doctoral study at the University of Waterloo in Canada. It is interesting to note that all three vice commandants of the Defense Science and Technology University (not covered in this study due to their relatively low ranks) also hold Ph.D.'s in engineering, including one degree received in France.

The rapid rise of these well-educated military elites to senior positions within the PLA leadership reflects the technocratic trend of the Chinese military. Over the past decade or so, the PLA has been pressured to improve its own "C4-I" (command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence) infrastructure. The PLA's pronounced military doctrine has been to make a "leap-over" transition from an army with mechanical and semi-mechanical equipment to an army equipped with digital facilities—"an information-age force," as it is often referred to in the Chinese media.<sup>6</sup> In the wake of what the Chinese military strategist (and former deputy chief of the General Staff) Xiong

Guangkai has called “on-going global military reform,” the PLA aims to reform itself in virtually all respects in order to prepare for the “new era of information warfare.”<sup>7</sup>

**Table 3**

*Top Military Leaders’ Biographical Characteristics (as of June 2010; totals in each category are Number: 57, Percentage: 100)*

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Age range in years / (birth year range)</i>		
66–70 (b. 1940–1944)	7	12.3
61–65 (b. 1945–1949)	28	49.1
56–60 (b. 1950–1954)	19	33.3
51–55 (b. 1955–1959)	3	5.3
<i>Top five provinces</i>		
Shandong	9	15.8
Hebei	8	14.0
Henan	6	10.5
Shaanxi	6	10.5
Liaoning	4	7.0
<i>Military rank</i>		
General /Admiral	20	35.1
Lieutenant General / Vice Admiral	32	56.1
Major General / Rear Admiral	5	8.8
<i>Service branch</i>		
Army	33	57.9
Air Force	7	12.3
Navy	6	10.5
Missile Corps	8	14.0
Others (Armed Police, Bodyguards, etc.)	3	5.3
<i>Functionary areas</i>		
Military	26	45.6
Political	24	42.1
Technical	2	3.5
Others	5	8.8

SOURCES: Xinhua News Agency. Calculated by the author.

Almost all 57 officers in this study attended the NDU and/or other PLA military academies as degree candidates or mid-career trainees. Commander of the Air Force Xu Qiliang, for example, attended the PLA’s Air Force No. 1 Aviation Preparatory School, the Air Force No. 8 Aviation School, and the Air Force No. 5 Aviation School early in his career as a pilot. He later enrolled in a mid-career training class at the PLA Air Force Academy in 1982 for six months, studied at the NDU from 1986 to 1988, attended a three-month advanced military operations class at the NDU in 1994, and then attended a five-month class for full army rank officers at the NDU in 2001.

Table 3 lists the top five provinces in which large numbers of senior military officers were born. Although Shandong is ranked at the top, the overall presence of Shandong natives in this study (15.8 percent) is far less significant than in certain earlier studies. Among the 67 military members of the 16<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in 1997, for example, 14 (21 percent) were born in Shandong; and even more astonishingly, 28 percent of the 46 military members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in 1992 were Shandong natives.<sup>8</sup> The same birthplace has often played an important role in the promotion of military officers. One explanation of why Shandong natives have been overrepresented in the military leadership since the 1990s is that two vice chairmen of the CMC in the 1990s, General Zhang Wannian and General Chi Haotian, happened to have hailed from Shandong.<sup>9</sup> Birthplace may help to explain the promotion of some current senior military leaders. For example, General Yu Yongbo and General Xu Caihou, two heavyweight military leaders who previously served or currently serve on the CMC and concurrently as director of the General Political Department, were natives of the same county, Wafangdian in Liaoning Province. Moreover, Xu had previously worked as an assistant to Yu.

Political favoritism in the military based on birthplace seems to continue into the present. For example, the two highest-ranking Navy officers, Commander Wu Shengli and Deputy Chief of the General Staff Sun Jianguo, were born in the same county, Wuqiao in Hebei Province. Sun is now the leading candidate to succeed Wu as commander of the Navy in the next two years. It has been reported in nonofficial media outlets in China that Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie intends to promote Lt. General Li Shiming (b. 1948), Commander of the Chengdu MR, to be the next chief of the General Staff. Liang and Li were born in the same county, Santai, in Sichuan Province.<sup>10</sup>

#### *The Prevalence of Princelings and Mishu*

In addition to shared birthplace, two other forms of political networking, family ties (largely the domain of princeling or *taizi*) and patron-client relations (personal secretaries or *mishu*) have helped officers with these advantages fast-track their careers. As in the realm of the civilian leadership, where a number of prominent children of former high-ranking officials currently hold important posts (including four of the six top contenders for the next Politburo Standing Committee), in the military too these “princelings” (*taizi*) are increasingly assuming positions of authority.<sup>11</sup> Table 4 (next page) exhibits the 10 senior military officers with princeling backgrounds. Others in this study may have come from high-ranking official families, but it is difficult to identify all who are princelings, because official Chinese sources seldom reveal the family backgrounds of senior leaders.

Among the 10 officers on this list, only General Li Jinai (b. 1942) will step down after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012 because of the age limit. Many may receive further promotions over the next few years. Several come from prominent political families, such as General Liu Yuan (b. 1951), the son of former PRC President Liu Shaoqi; General Zhang Haiyang (b. 1949), the son of former CMC Vice Chairman Zhang Zhen; and Vice Admiral Liu Xiaojiang (b. 1949), the son-in-law of former CCP Secretary-General Hu Yaobang.

**Table 4**  
*Senior Military Leaders with “Princeling” Backgrounds*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year Born</i>	<i>Current Post</i>	<i>Princeling Background</i>
Li Jinai	1942	Director, General Political Department; CMC member	Nephew of Li Jing (former deputy chief of the General Staff)
Wu Shengli	1945	Commander, Navy; CMC member	Son of a former vice governor of Zhejiang Province
Ma Xiaotian	1949	Deputy chief of the General Staff	Son of Ma Zaiyao (former dean of PLA Political Academy), son-in-law of Zhang Shaohua (former dep. sec. of Discipline Commission of CMC)
Zhang Haiyang	1949	Commissar, 2nd Artillery Corps	Son of Zhang Zhen (former vice chair, CMC), son-in-law of Sun Keji (former vice commissar of Nanjing Military Region)
Zhang Qinsheng	1948	Deputy chief of the General Staff	Son of Zhang Zhi (former deputy head, Luliang Prefecture, Shanxi Province)
Zhang Youxia	1950	Commander, Shenyang Military Region	Son of Zhang Zongxun (former director, General Logistic Department)
Liu Xiaojiang	1949	Commissar, Navy	Son-in-law of Hu Yaobang (former secretary general of the CCP), son of Liu Xiyuan (former vice chairman of Shaanxi People’s Congress)
Liu Yuan	1951	Commissar, Academy of Military Sciences	Son of Liu Shaoqi (former president of PRC)
Liu Sheng	1956	Deputy director, General Armanent Department	Son of Liu Peisan (former lieutenant general of PLA)
Liu Yazhou	1952	Commissar, National Defense University	Son-in-law of Li Xiannian (former president of PRC), son of Liu Jiande (former deputy commissar of the Logistics Department of Lanzhou Military Region)

NOTES: CMC = Central Military Region; CCP = Chinese Communist Party; dep. sec. = deputy secretary; PLA = People’s Liberation Army; PRC = People’s Republic of China



These princelings share a strong political identity. Without exception, all prominent leaders with princeling backgrounds greatly benefited from their family ties early in their careers. They were “born red”—that is, a large number of them were born during the late 1940s and 1950s as their parents’ generation won civil war victories and became the new rulers of the Communist regime. They generally not only received the best education available, attending elite universities such as the Harbin Institute of Military Engineering or elite programs at the NDU, but also took shortcuts in their career advancement, often under the direct “guidance” of their fathers’ comrades-in-arms.

Within the “culture” of the PLA, marrying the daughter of a high-ranking leader is the fastest way to get a promotion.<sup>12</sup> The life experience of Commissar of the NDU, Lt. General Liu Yazhou (son-in-law of former PRC President Li Xiannian), is illustrative. Liu was born into a military family in Ningbo, Zhejiang, in 1952. His parents fought in the Korean War as junior officers. Liu grew up in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, where he attended a school for children of the military. In 1968 he joined the PLA, serving as deputy monitor, monitor, and platoon leader before working as a correspondent for the propaganda department of a regiment. In 1972, the year after China’s universities were reopened to the “worker-peasant-soldier students,” Liu attended Wuhan University to study English. After graduation in 1975 he was assigned to work in the propaganda department of the Beijing Airport. In 1979 he married Li Xiaolin, the daughter of Li Xiannian, then vice chairman of the CCP. That year he was transferred to the Liaison Division of the Political Department of the Air Force, where he served as a clerk and conducted research on the development of foreign air forces. Liu published several novels in the early 1980s and was transferred to the Culture Division of the Political Department of the Air Force, where he acquired the rank of deputy regimental commander in 1986.

From 1986 to 1987, he spent a year as a visiting scholar at Stanford University. In 1988 he worked as a staff member (with the rank of deputy division commander) at the Political Department of the CMC, and in 1990 he was transferred to be commissar of a research institute at the Headquarters of the General Staff. In 1992 Liu visited Taiwan as a novelist and later wrote many commentaries on cross-Strait affairs.<sup>13</sup> Liu is believed to have become a confidant of then Secretary General Jiang Zemin, who was a protégé of Liu’s father-in-law. Between 1993 and 2002, Liu served as deputy director and then director in the Political Department of the Air Force of the Beijing MR. In 2002, he was appointed to become commissar of the Air Force of the Chengdu MR, and one year later he was promoted to be vice commissar of the Air Force. In 2007 he was elected a member of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, and in 2009 he was appointed to be Commissar of the NDU. At every turn Liu secured all of the best opportunities. His military career differs greatly from those officers without family ties who are forced to advance step by step.

In general, this type of information concerning officers’ “father-in-law connections” is difficult to obtain. Certain other senior officers who may have princeling son-in-law backgrounds similar to Liu’s are not often identified, but it is reasonable to argue, based on the existing data, that the princeling phenomenon has been prevalent within China’s

military leadership.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that in July 2009 CMC Chairman Hu Jintao granted three officers the rank of general, the PLA's highest rank. All three (Ma Xiaotian, Zhang Haiyang, and Liu Yuan) were princelings. In doing this, Hu sent an important message to the princelings in the PLA, that he would be as accommodating to them as was his predecessor Jiang Zemin (who himself is a princeling). The implied quid pro quo is that the princelings in the PLA would signal strong support for Hu Jintao's leadership. If this analysis is correct, the prevalence and growing power of military leaders with princeling backgrounds may pose an increasingly serious challenge for the future of civilian leadership.

The ubiquitous role of *mishu* in elite recruitment and promotion is another important phenomenon in Chinese politics today.<sup>15</sup> *Mishu*, or staff members who have served as personal assistants, office directors, or chiefs of staff to top leaders, enjoy clear advantages in terms of their career prospects. The experience of working in close proximity to senior leaders allows them to see how power and authority function up close, build political ties, and land on the inside track of career advancement. Besides the civilian leadership, the *mishu* experience has also become one of the many channels for military advancement over the past two decades. This is partly due to the fact that no officer can claim much combat performance when the PLA has, for decades, engaged in very little active warfare. Consequently, political loyalty and political management skills have become all the more valuable. At least 20 officers (35 percent) of this study of the top 57 most prominent members of the military have backgrounds as former *mishu*, assistants and/or office directors for senior leaders (see table 5, next page).

These *mishu*-turned generals include Lt. General Jia Ting'an (b. 1952), deputy director of the General Political Department, who began as a *mishu* to Jiang Zemin in 1982 when Jiang was vice minister of the Ministry of Electronics Industry. Jia continued to work in this capacity in Shanghai, where Jiang served as mayor and party secretary. Jiang brought him to Beijing in 1989 to serve as director of his office and in 2003 appointed him director of the General Office of the CMC. The current director of the General Office of the CMC, Lt. General Wang Guanzhong (b. 1953), served as a *mishu* to Yang Shangkun, former president of the PRC and former executive vice chairman of the CMC. Major General Cao Qing (b. 1952), director of the Bodyguard Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, began his career as a bodyguard and *mishu* to Ye Jianying, the former minister of Defense and former chairman of the NPC. Several rising stars in the PLA also served as *mishu* for high-ranking military leaders. For example, Director of the General Armament Department Chang Wanquan served as a *mishu* to Han Xianchu, then commander of the Lanzhou MR, from 1978 to 1982. Deputy Chief of the General Staff Hou Shusen served, early in his career, as a *mishu* to General Wang Ke, former director of the General Logistics Department.

**Table 5***Senior Military Leaders with Mishu Experience*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Current Post</i>	<i>Previously served as mishu, assistant, or office director to:</i>
Xu Caihou	Vice chair, CMC	Yu Yongbo (former director, General Political Department)
Li Jinai	Director, General Political Department	Yu Qiuli (former director, General Political Department)
Chang Wanquan	Director, General Armament Department	Han Xianchu (former commander, Lanzhou Military Region)
Wang Guanzhong	Director, General Office of CMC	Yang Shangkun (former vice chair, CMC)
Zhang Qinsheng	Deputy chief of the General Staff	Liang Guanglie (minister of Defense)
Sun Jianguo	Deputy chief of the General Staff	Chen Bingde (chief of the General Staff)
Hou Shusen	Deputy chief of the General Staff	Wang Ke (former director, General Logistic Department)
Cao Qing	Director, Bodyguards Bureau	Ye Jianying (former minister of Defense)
Jia Ting'an	Deputy director, General Political Department	Jiang Zemin (former chairman, CMC)
Liu Zhenqi	Deputy director, General Political Department	Li Jinai (director of General Political Department)
Tong Shiping	Deputy director, General Political Department	Li Jinai (director of General Political Department)
Du Jincai	Deputy director, General Political Department	Li Jinai (director of General Political Department)
Li Andong	Dep. director, General Armament Department	Cao Gangchuan (former director, General Armament Department)
Sun Dafa	Commissar, General Logistics Department	Li Desheng (former director, General Political Department)
Gu Junshan	Deputy director, General Logistics Department	Liao Xilong (director, General Logistics Department)
Sun Sijing	Deputy commissar, General Logistics Dept.	Zhou Keyu (former commissar, General Logistics Department)
Yu Linxiang	Commissar, People's Armed Police	Name unknown (former director, Political Dept., Nanjing MR)
Fang Fenghui	Commander, Beijing MR	Name unknown (former commander of No. 21 Group Army)
Tian Xiusi	Commissar, Chengdu MR	Name unknown (former commander of Xinjiang Military District)
Fan Changlong	Commander, Jinan MR	Liang Guanglie (former chief of the General Staff)

NOTES: CMC = Central Military Commission; Dept. = Department; MR = Military Region

The above cases indicate that those who serve as *mishu* or bodyguard to top leaders are important people to watch. These *mishu* and bodyguards are often the most reliable confidants of the top leaders. However, both the general public and China's political establishment are generally quite critical of the *mishu* phenomenon and other forms of political favoritism. Jia Ting'an, for example, received the lowest number of votes among the alternates on the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, as a large number of his political peers were resistant to his appointment. Similarly, low vote totals accompanied now retired Lt. General You Xigui's nomination. As Jiang's former bodyguard, Lt. General You was among the alternate members on the 16<sup>th</sup> Central Committee who lost many votes in the 2002 election. These facts indicate that even the Party's political establishment does not like to see current top leaders' *mishu* or bodyguards acquire too much power.

It remains to be seen whether the tensions between military officers with *mishu* and/or princeling backgrounds, on the one hand, and military officers without these backgrounds, on the other, will become more acute in the years ahead. While more meritocratic criteria of selection, standardized procedures, and technocratic trends now influence the selection of leaders in the PLA more than ever before, paradoxically, informal networks such as blood ties, patron-client bonds, and birthplace associations remain fairly ubiquitous factors in the changing composition of the military's leadership.

## Top Contenders for the Next CMC in 2012

A set of crucial questions surrounds the upcoming change of PLA leadership and the composition of the new Central Military Commission in 2012. Who will be the new vice chairmen and new members of the CMC? What will the new composition of the Chinese military's most important decision-making body tell us about the new dynamics between civilian and military elites and the possible challenges that lie ahead? What might an analysis of who's in and who's out of the CMC reveal about the direction in which China's military modernization efforts are heading?

Table 6 (next page) presents a list of the most likely candidates for the next CMC. The list was formed according to five criteria: 1) age; 2) the importance of the candidate's current post; 3) current membership status in the CMC and/or the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP; 4) military rank; and 5) princeling background or other patron-client ties (consideration of which helps to facilitate a balance of power in current Chinese leadership politics).

General Chang Wanquan, Admiral Wu Shengli, and General Xu Qiliang currently serve on the CMC, and in 2012 are likely to take over the vice chairmanship and the post of minister of Defense, respectively. It is noteworthy that all three officers have worked exclusively in the military operational field, none having advanced through functional areas of political affairs within the military. The PLA military has two parallel functional areas at almost all leadership levels, namely, military operations (e.g., commander and chief of staff) and political affairs (e.g., political commissar and director of the political department). A commissar is a high-ranking functionary who holds coequal rank and

**Table 6**  
*Top Contenders for CMC Membership in 2012*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Current position</i>	<i>Year born</i>	<i>Age in 2012</i>	<i>Military rank (year attained)</i>	<i>Service branch</i>	<i>Functional area</i>	<i>CC member status</i>	<i>Likely status after 18th Party Congress</i>
Chang Wanquan	CMC member, director, General Armament Dept.	1949	63	General (2007)	Army	Military	Full (since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC vice chair, Politburo member
Wu Shengli	CMC member, commander, Navy	1945	67	Admiral (2007)	Navy	Military	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC vice chair, Politburo member
Xu Qiliang	CMC member, commander, Air Force	1950	62	General (2007)	Air Force	Military	Full (since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC; AM 14 <sup>th</sup> )	Promoted to CMC vice chair, Politburo member
Ma Xiaotian	Deputy chief of the General Staff	1949	63	General (2009)	Air Force	Military	Full (since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, commander of Air Force
Zhang Haiyang	Commissar, 2nd Artillery Corps	1949	63	General (2009)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Artillery	Political	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, director, General Political Dept.
Deng Changyou	Commissar, Air Force	1947	65	General (2006)	Air Force	Political	Full (since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, director, General Political Dept.
Chi Wanchun	Commissar, General Armament Dept.	1946	66	General (2006)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Artillery	Political	Full (since 16 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC vice chair
Fan Changlong	Commander, Jinan MR	1947	65	General (2008)	Army	Military	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC; AM 16 <sup>th</sup> )	Promoted to CMC member, director, General Armament Dept.
Zhang Qinsheng	Deputy chief of the General Staff	1948	64	Lieutenant general (2006)	Army	Military	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, chief of the General Staff
Sun Jianguo	Deputy chief of the General Staff	1952	60	Vice admiral (2006)	Navy	Military	Alternate (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, commander of Navy
Liu Xiaojiang	Commissar, Navy	1949	63	Vice admiral (2002)	Air Force	Political	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, director, General Political Dept.
Wei Fenghe	Chief of Staff, 2nd Artillery Corps	1954	58	Lieutenant general (2008)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Artillery	Military	Alternate (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, commander, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Artillery
Fang Fenghui	Commander, Beijing MR	1951	61	Lieutenant general (2005)	Army	Military	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, chief of the General Staff
Zhang Youxia	Commander, Shenyang MR	1950	62	Lieutenant general (2007)	Army	Military	Full (since 17 <sup>th</sup> PC)	Promoted to CMC member, director, General Logistic Dept.

NOTES: AM = Alternate member; CC = Central Committee; CMC = Central Military Commission; Dept. = Department; MR = Military Region; PC = Party Congress

authority with the commander of a unit. Officers in military operations or political affairs usually advance their careers within the same sector. Generally speaking, no military order can be issued without the prior approval of both the commander and the commissar.<sup>16</sup> Unsurprisingly, the CMC's two vice-chairman positions have traditionally been occupied by one individual with an operational background and one from political affairs. In the Jiang era, Zhang Wannian (military) and Chi Haotian (political) held these two posts. Similarly, under Hu Jintao's chairmanship, Guo Boxiong (military) and Xu Caihou (political) have occupied the two posts. This study of the PLA's 57 top officers also shows that these functionaries are almost equal in numbers (see table 3).

It remains to be seen whether the new CMC in 2012 will break this pattern of allocating the two highest positions in the PLA to two different functionary areas. Some analysts believe that General Zhang Haiyang, currently commissar of the 2nd Artillery Corps, will be promoted to one of the vice chairmanships at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, representing the functionary area of political affairs.<sup>17</sup> However, compared with the aforementioned three candidates, Chang, Wu, and Xu, Zhang may have to wait for another five-year term before assuming such an important position. Zhang is currently not a CMC member; and more importantly, he was promoted to the rank of general as recently as in 2009. Given the Chinese military's hierarchical nature, such a rise may engender stiff resistance from the political establishment, partly stemming from the fact that Zhang is a princeling. Unless Zhang receives a special promotion to become a member of the CMC prior to the 2012 Party Congress, it will be difficult for him to take a two-step jump to be a vice chairman of the CMC. If one of the vice chairmanships will have to go to a PLA officer with a commissar background, General Deng Changyou (b. 1947), commissar of the Air Force, and General Chi Wanchun (b. 1946), commissar of the General Armament Department, are more likely candidates because they both received the rank of general in 2006. General Zhang Haiyang is more likely to be appointed director of the General Political Department, concurrently obtaining a membership in the CMC in 2012.

Two deputy chiefs of the General Staff, General Ma Xiaotian (b. 1949) and Vice Admiral Sun Jianguo (b. 1952), will most likely succeed General Xu Qiliang and Admiral Wu Shengli to become the commanders of the Air Force and Navy, respectively. Meanwhile, the current chief of staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Corps, Lt. General Wei Fenghe (b. 1954), is expected to become the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Corps in the next two years. All three of these officers will obtain membership seats in the CMC, representing these three important service branches in the PLA. If this forecast holds true, the next CMC will be far less dominated by officers from the Army than ever before in PRC history. Among the 10 current military members of the CMC, six are from the Army. Assuming that the next CMC will have the same number of seats, at least six of them and perhaps seven, including one or two of the vice chairmanships, will go to officers from the other three service branches (Wu, Xu, Ma, Zhang, Deng or Chi, Sun, and Wei). This reflects the relative decline of the Army in the PLA's top leadership, which is in line with the PRC leadership's pronounced strategy to prepare for 21<sup>st</sup>-century warfare.

Some of the rising stars who represent the Army are also known for backgrounds in the theory and training of joint military campaigns. Lt. General Zhang Qinsheng (b. 1948), deputy chief of the General Staff, was only an associate dean of the NDU in 2002. Within eight years, he advanced his career rapidly, moving from director of the Department of Military Operations in the Headquarters of the Chief of General Staff (2003–2004), to assistant chief of the General Staff (2004–2006), deputy chief of the General Staff (2006–2007), commander of the Guangzhou MR (2007–2009), and finally to deputy chief and deputy Party secretary of the General Staff (2009–present). Zhang is expected to obtain a seat in the next CMC and to take one of the directorships of the four general departments.

As has been the case over the last two decades, the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress will likely install current commanders of the PLA's seven military regions into some of these very important directorship posts. Table 6 identifies three rising stars who currently serve as commanders of the military regions: Commander of the Jinan MR Fan Changlong (b. 1947), Commander of the Beijing MR Fang Fenghui (B. 1951), and Commander of the Shenyang MR Zhang Youxia (b. 1950). Fan has the rank of general and was a protégé of Xu Caihou, who helped Fan advance since they both worked at the No. 16 Group Army in the 1980s. Fan has long been considered a rising star of the PLA leadership. His career advancement, however, slowed down in the last few years, leading some to suspect that he had too obviously campaigned personally for promotions.<sup>18</sup> General Xu, his retirement upcoming, may make a last effort to help his protégé gain CMC membership. The career prospects of Lt. General Fang Fenghui seem now to be closely linked to Hu Jintao: Fang served as commander-in-chief of the military parade in 2009, which celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the PRC; and in several important meetings, Hu has publicly praised Fan for his marvelous leadership role in making the parade a success.<sup>19</sup> Lt. General Zhang Youxia is the son of General Zhang Zongxun, former director of the General Logistics Department. Unlike most officers with princeling backgrounds, Zhang has advanced his career step by step, serving as a commander at the levels of company, battalion, regiment, army, military district, and military region. He will be a candidate to head one of the four general departments in the leadership transition.

Among the 14 candidates for the next CMC listed in table 6, six are princelings (Wu, Ma, Liu, and the three Zhangs). Although probably not all of them will be able to become members of the CMC, it is reasonable to expect that there will be more princelings in the new CMC than there are in the current one, which holds only two (Li Jinai and Wu Shengli). The prevalence of military leaders with princeling backgrounds mirrors the rise of princelings in the top civilian leadership. If factional struggles were to break out again in the future (as occurred during the 1989 Tiananmen uprising), it is possible that, owing to their common identity as children of privilege with shared political interests, China's military princelings would side with the CCP's civilian princelings, most noticeably Vice President Xi Jinping. If so, the prevalence of princelings in the military could prove crucial to the outcome of such an instance of intra-elite contention.

While outside analysts may detect factions and coalitions within the civilian leadership of China, the factional line in the military leadership is often blurred due to the

Chinese authorities' sensitivity to the potential danger of such a cleavage. Some analysts believe that the two most likely vice chairmen of the CMC have their factional ties: General Xu Qiliang has been Jiang Zemin's protégé since Xu's assignment to Shanghai in the 1980s, and General Chang Wanquan has Hu Jintao's blessing. But top Chinese leaders seem to understand fully that to use senior military officers for personal political gain is a very dangerous game.<sup>20</sup>

For the past two decades, China's top leaders have made a concerted effort to keep factional politics in the military strictly out of the public eye. Nevertheless, nepotism and favoritism in military recruitment and promotions have not gone away. At a time when China faces an uncertain leadership succession at home and must follow an uncharted path of searching for its new power position in the world, the upcoming large-scale turnover in PLA leadership and the potential pitfalls associated with it deserve serious attention.

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## Notes

\*The author is indebted to Yinsheng Li for research assistance. The author also thanks Jordan Lee for suggesting ways in which to clarify the article.

<sup>1</sup> For more discussion on this observation, see Cheng Li and Lynn White, "The Army in the Succession to Deng Xiaoping: Familiar Fealties and Technocratic Trends," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 8 (August 1993): 757–786; Cheng Li, "The New Military Elite: Generational Profile and Contradictory Trends," in David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunness (eds.), *Swimming in a New Sea: Civil-Military Issues in Today's China* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), pp. 48–73; Yü Yü-lin, "The Role of the PLA in Mainland China's Power Transition," *Issues and Studies* 21, no. 12 (December 1985): 79–83; William Whitson, "The Field Army in Chinese Communist Military Politics," *China Quarterly*, no. 37 (January/March 1969); William Parish, "Factions in Chinese Military Politics," *China Quarterly*, no. 56 (October/December 1973): 667–99; and David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Cheng Li and Scott W. Harold, "China's New Military Elite," *China Security* 3, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 65.

<sup>3</sup> For more discussion on the Chinese middle class, see Cheng Li, ed., *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond Economic Transformation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Art Pine, "Off the Charts?" *Congress Daily*, June 14, 2010. Also see <http://www.nationaljournal.com/congressdaily>.

<sup>5</sup> Liu Mingfu, *Zhongguomeng-hou Meiguo shidai de daguo siwei yu zhanlue dingwei* [The China dream: The great power's mindset and strategic stance in the post-American hegemony era] (Beijing: China Friendship Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> *Remin ribao* (People's Daily), May 25, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2003-08/04/content\\_1009538.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2003-08/04/content_1009538.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Li and White, "The Army in the Succession to Deng Xiaoping," p. 767.

<sup>9</sup> Ling Haijian, *Zhonggong jundui xinjiangxing* [The profile of prominent military chiefs in China] (Hong Kong: Taipingyang shiji chubanshe, 1999), p. 367.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://club.xilu.com/xinguancha/msgview-950389-99013.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Among the six top contenders (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Wang Qishan, Li Yuanchao, Wang Yang, and Bo Xilai) for the Politburo Standing Committee of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, four (Xi, Wang Qishan, Li Yuanchao, and Bo) are princelings. For the large number of princelings in the civilian leadership at present-day China, see Cheng Li, "China's Most Powerful 'Princelings': How Many Will Enter the New Politburo?" *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 7, no. 19 (October 2007): 2–5.

<sup>12</sup> There is a descriptive Chinese phrase for this, especially popular in the PLA: "*chenglong kuaixu*" (a son-in-law on the fast career track with the help of "the dragon.")



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<sup>13</sup> Yu Shiping, *Xin taizijun* [New Military Princelings] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2010), p. 196.

<sup>14</sup> For more discussion on this phenomenon, see Yu, *Xin taizijun*.

<sup>15</sup> For a further discussion of the distinctions between various types of *mishu*, see Wei Li and Lucian W. Pye, “The Ubiquitous Role of the *Mishu* in Chinese Politics,” *China Quarterly* 132 (December 1992): 916–925.

<sup>16</sup> For more discussion of this, see Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*.

<sup>17</sup> Xu Santong, *Junzhong shaozhuangpai zhangwo Zhongguo bingquan* [Young Guard Army: Grasping China’s military power] (Hong Kong: Haya chubanshe, 2009), pp. 124–125.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93–101.

<sup>20</sup> Gao Xin, *Zhongguo dangzhengjun zhongyang lingdaoceng* [Central Party, government and military leadership in China] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2006). Also Xu, *Junzhong shaozhuangpai zhangwo Zhongguo bingquan*, p. 42 and p. 106.