

# Promoting “Young Guards”: The Recent High Turnover in the PLA Leadership (Part I: Purges and Reshuffles)

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The continuing consolidation of power has been the most noticeable trend under the leadership of Xi Jinping since the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012. Undoubtedly, a key component in this strengthening of both Xi’s personal power and his new administration’s authority has centered on the military domain. Xi has gone about the consolidation process through several important political and tactical moves, including the purges of the two highest-ranking generals under the previous administration on corruption and other charges; the arrest of over 40 senior military officers on various charges of wrongdoing; large-scale reshuffling of generals between regions, departments, and services; ongoing efforts to reform the PLA structure and operations; and, most importantly, the rapid promotion of “young guards” (少壮派) in the Chinese military.

All of these bold measures will have profound implications—not only for Xi’s political standing in preparation for the next leadership turnover in 2017, but also for the trajectory of civilian-military relations in the country and for the assessment of China’s military modernization. The first installation in this series focuses on the recent purges and reshuffling of military leaders, which has significant consequences in the political dynamics of present-day China.

It is an old saying in the history of the Chinese Communist movement that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”<sup>1</sup> Although this famous Mao Zedong slogan emphasizes the Communist doctrine that the party commands the army in seizing and retaining state power, a top party leader’s consolidation of personal power cannot be achieved without strong support from the military. And so it is in today’s China under the leadership of Xi Jinping.

At the same time that he became the top leader at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012, Xi Jinping also assumed the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC). This move was in remarkable contrast to the trajectory followed by Xi’s predecessor Hu Jintao, who waited two additional years before obtaining the paramount military post in the previous political succession. Even more astoundingly, Xi made a very bold and decisive move to imprison on corruption charges the two highest-ranking military generals of the previous administration, Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, former vice chairmen of the CMC.

## Xi and the PLA: Learning From Mao and Deng, not Hu and Wen

In spite of the political rhetoric claiming that the civilian leadership supervises the military, Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou in fact controlled the personnel affairs of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for a decade (2002–2012). During that period, promotions among the PLA senior officer corps were primarily subject to the approval of these two heavyweight patrons. Guo and Xu seriously undermined the civilian leadership's authority over military affairs during the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration. This was most evident during the first couple of days following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, when Premier Wen Jiabao went on national television to bluntly and desperately address PLA leaders who had been very slow to respond to his calls to send troops to the earthquake area for disaster relief: "It is the Chinese people who feed you, and you should figure out what to do now."<sup>2</sup>

In a widely publicized television interview in March 2015, three former PLA major generals revealed that Xu Caihou solicited 20 million yuan (approximately US\$ 3.25 million) for the "sale" of the post of commander of a military region.<sup>3</sup> Major General Yang Chunchang, former deputy director of the Department of Military Development at the Academy of Military Sciences, said that selling military ranks and officer positions was a widespread phenomenon in the PLA while Guo and Xu were in charge. These corrupt top military leaders "made CCP leader Hu Jintao a mere figurehead" (架空).<sup>4</sup> As for Guo Boxiong, about nine months before his arrest, Zhang Musheng, an insider of Chinese elite politics and a close friend of Political Commissar of the PLA General Logistics Department Liu Yuan, implicitly told the Chinese media that in addition to receiving bribes through personnel appointments, General Guo Boxiong even embezzled China's military funds.<sup>5</sup>

It is apparent that Xi Jinping has decided to avert the same awful treatment that Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao received from these two top military generals. In December 2012, one month after he became general secretary of the CCP, Xi emphatically claimed that the PLA should be "absolutely loyal to the party, absolutely clean, and absolutely reliable."<sup>6</sup> At the first meeting of the CMC under his leadership, Xi stated that "the Chinese military, which controls the guns, cannot be a hiding place for corrupt figures."<sup>7</sup> In October 2014, Xi Jinping convened the conference of political affairs of the PLA in Gutian Town, Fujian Province, reaffirming the "party's absolute control over the military."<sup>8</sup> Gutian is a historical site of the Chinese Communist Revolution because a meeting of the Red Army Branch No. 4. was held there in December 1929. During the meeting, the principle that the party commands the gun was established and Mao Zedong himself inaugurated his leadership over the Branch.

Not surprisingly, the Chinese official media now refer to this recent meeting chaired by Xi in Gutian as "the New Gutian Conference" (新古田会议).<sup>9</sup> An important agenda set at the "New Gutian Conference" was to vigorously crack down on corruption in the military, especially to enforce "strict management of the high-level and middle-level officers in the PLA."<sup>10</sup> Also in contrast to Hu Jintao—who, according to some Hong Kong based analysts, seldom worked in the office of the CMC—Xi Jinping spends at

least half a day every week in his office in the CMC, handling military affairs including personnel matters.<sup>11</sup>

During the past two and a half years, the Xi administration actually has purged on corruption charges as many as 42 senior officers ranked at the vice-army level (副军级) or above. This PLA purge is apparently the largest since the famous Lin Biao Incident in 1971.<sup>12</sup> But it is important to note that considering the fact that Guo and Xu controlled the promotion of military elites for about a decade, the purged 42 high-ranking officers constitute only a very small portion of PLA leaders. A large number of protégés of Guo and Xu have presumably remained in power. In dealing with this challenge, Xi Jinping apparently has adopted the same method that Mao and Deng used to prevent military factionalism or even a military coup—namely, large-scale reshuffling of senior military officers. After the Lin Biao Incident, Mao was beset with the increasing power of local military leaders and the potential for conflict among them or against central authorities. Mao and Deng reportedly had a meeting when Deng reemerged for the first time in 1973. As the new director of the General Staff Department of the PLA, Deng told Mao that he could solve the problem quickly by simultaneously reassigning the top officers of all eight military regions existing at that time.<sup>13</sup> Mao took Deng's suggestion, and commanders of the military regions were reshuffled immediately.<sup>14</sup> Each commander was allowed to bring only a few supporting staff (e.g., a doctor, nurse, personal secretary, bodyguard, driver, and cook) to the new region.<sup>15</sup>

Deng's tactics worked well, both then and later on. During the past three decades, no regional military upheavals have occurred, even with the country going through turbulent periods such as the 1976 death of Mao, the 1989 Tiananmen incident, and the 2012 Bo Xilai episode. The Chinese leadership successfully undermined the potential threat of military localism through sporadic large-scale reshuffling of top military elites over the years.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, within roughly two and a half years under his leadership, Xi Jinping has reshuffled senior-level military officers in a substantial way. Among the 91 highest-ranking military leaders in the PLA, 57 (62.6 percent) are newcomers who emerged after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012. In the PLA Air Force, with the exception of Commander Ma Xiaotian (born in 1949), all top leaders, including the political commissar, deputy commanders, deputy political commissars, chief of staff, director of the Political Department, and director of the Logistics Department, were new appointees assigned during Xi's presidency. Five of them, including Political Commissar Yu Zhongfu (b. 1956), Deputy Political Commissar Zhao Yiliang (b. 1954), Deputy Political Commissar Song Kun (b. 1953), Director of Political Department Fan Xiaojun (b. 1955), and Director of Logistics Department Zheng Xuexiang (b. 1958), were appointed during their first year of service. In addition, the PLA's 18 group armies also experienced a large-scale reshuffle in 2014.<sup>17</sup> According to Ji Beiqun, a seasoned analyst of Chinese elite politics, the reshuffling of senior military officers under Xi Jinping has even exceeded the scale and scope of the aforementioned PLA reshuffle in 1973.<sup>18</sup> A review of the purges and reshuffles orchestrated by Xi over the past two and a half years would be instrumental in assessing the degree of success and limitations in Xi's control over the military.

## Purges of Senior Officers

Table 1 (next page) lists all of the 42 senior officers ranking at the vice-army level or above who have been purged following the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012. It does not include Lt. General Gu Junshan (b. 1956), former deputy director of the PLA General Logistics Department, who was purged in February 2012. In March 2014, the Chinese authorities prosecuted Gu on charges of corruption, bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of power at a military court. Gu's case led to the investigation of both Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong. The first senior military officer purged under Xi's leadership was Major General Wang Minggui, former political commissar of the Air Defense Command Academy. Wang was arrested in November 2013, a year after Xi became the top leader. Twenty-two of the individuals listed in the table (52.4 percent) were purged in 2014, and 19 (45.2 percent) were purged in the first seven months of 2015, suggesting the growing intensity of purges within the PLA leadership.

Among the 42 purged officers, two held the military rank of general, four were lieutenant generals, 28 (two-thirds) were major generals, and only one held the rank of colonel. None of the PLA's 38 remaining full generals (上将) has been under official investigation, according to official Chinese media.<sup>19</sup> In 2013–2014, the PLA had about 120 active lieutenant generals (中将) and approximately 1,100 active major generals (少将) at a given time. Therefore, the purged lieutenant generals and major generals only accounted for about 3 percent of both ranks. Guo and Xu were Politburo members on the previous (the 17<sup>th</sup>) Central Committee. Only two officers served on the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP: Lt. General Yang Jinshan, former vice commander of the Chengdu Military Region, was a full member; and Lt. General Fan Changmi, former deputy political commissar of the Lanzhou Military Region, was an alternate member.

The 42 purged officers were from all service types, although the army made up the largest group. While the arrests of several officers were directly linked to the Xu Caihou, Guo Boxiong, and Gu Junshan cases, a large number were unrelated, and some of the purged officers had heavyweight patrons who have not been disgraced as a result. A majority of those arrested were born in the 1950s. A few born in the 1960s or even 1970s were considered rising stars in the PLA. For example, Major General Zhang Gongxian (b. 1960) served as a personal assistant to then Vice Chair of the CMC Xu Caihou, and he was appointed director of the Political Department of the Jinan Military Region in 2012. Only a very small number of officers who were born in the 1960s obtained that level of military leadership. Major General Guo Zhenggang (b. 1970), former deputy political commissar of the Zhejiang Military District, apparently owed his rapid rise in the military ranks to his father, Guo Boxiong.

*(text continues on p. 7)*

**Table 1***High-ranking Military Officers Purged after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012 (as of August 2015)*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>Military position</i>	<i>Military rank</i>	<i>Service branch</i>	<i>Date purged</i>	<i>Mentor-patron ties</i>
1	Xu Caihou	1943	Vice chair, CMC	General	Army	2014.6	
2	Guo Boxiong	1942	Vice chair, CMC	General		2015.7	
3	Yang Jinshan	1954	Vice commander, Chengdu MR	Lt. General	Army	2014.7	Xu Caihou
4	Liu Zheng	1954	Deputy director, General Logistics Department	Lt. General	Army	2014.11	
5	Fan Changmi	1955	Deputy political commissar, Lanzhou MR	Lt. General	Army	2014.12	
6	Yu Daqiang	1957	Deputy political commissar, 2nd Artillery	Lt. General	2nd Artillery	2014.12	Xu Caihou
7	Wang Minggui	1954	Political commissar, Air Defense Command Academy	Major General	Army	2013.11	
8	Fang Wenping	1950	Commander, Shanxi Military District	Major General	Army	2014.3	
9	Wei Jin	1959	Deputy political commissar, Tibet MD	Major General	Army	2014.4	
10	Chen Qiang	1956	Deputy commander, 2nd Artillery Base 56	Major General	2nd Artillery	2014.5	
11	Fu Linguo	N/A	Deputy chief of staff, General Logistics Dept.	Major General	Army	2014.5	Liao Xilong <sup>[a]</sup>
12	Ye Wanyong	1953	Political commissar, Sichuan Military District	Major General	Army	2014.5	Xu Caihou
13	Zhang Gongxian	1960	Director, Political Department of Jinan MR	Major General	Army	2014.7	Xu Caihou
14	Zhang Qibin	1953	Deputy Chief of Staff, Jinan MR	Major General	Army	2014.8	
15	Zhu Heping	1957	Director, Joint Logistics Dept., Chengdu MR	Major General	Army	2014.8	Zhang Wannian <sup>[b]</sup>
16	Yuan Shijun	1949	Commander, Hubei Military District	Major General	Army	2014.10	
17	Wang Aiguo	1965	Director, Joint Logistics Dept., Shenyang MR	Major General	Army	2014.11	
18	Dai Weimin	1962	Vice president, Nanjing Political Academy	Major General	Army	2014.11	
19	Gao Xiaoyan	1957	Deputy political commissar, PLA Information Engineering Univ.	Major General	Army	2014.11	
20	Duan Tianjie	N/A	Deputy director, Political Dept., National Defense University	Major General	Army	2014.11	
21	Huang Xianjun	N/A	Director, Political Department, Shanxi MD	Major General	Army	2014.11	
22	Ma Xiangdong	N/A	Director, Political Department, Nanjing Political Academy	Colonel	Army	2014.12	
23	Zhang Daixin	N/A	Deputy commander, Heilongjiang Military District	Major General	Army	2014.12	

	Zhang						
24	Dongshui	1956	Deputy political commissar, 2nd Artillery	Major General	2nd Artillery	2015.1	
25	Lan Weijie	N/A	Deputy commander, Hebei Military District	Major General	Army	2015.1	Gu Junshan
26	Liu Hongjie	1959	Deputy director, Management & Support Dept., General Staff	Major General	Army	2015.1	
27	Cheng Jie	N/A	Deputy chief of staff, North Sea Fleet	Rear Admiral	Navy	2015.1	
28	Chen Jianfeng	N/A	Deputy director, Joint Logistics Dept., Guangzhou MR	Major General	Army	2015.1	
29	Cai Guangliao	1958	Deputy director, Office of Guangdong Provincial Party Committee	Major General	Armed Police	2015.1	
30	Huang Xing	N/A	Head, Scientific Research Guidance Dept. of Military Science	Major General	Army	2015.1	
31	Chen Hongyan	N/A	Deputy director, Political Dept. of Beijing MD	Major General	Air Force	2015.2	
32	Wang Sheng	N/A	Director, Logistics Dept., Air Force of Guangzhou MR	Major General	Air Force	2015.2	
33	Guo Zhenggang	1970	Deputy political commissar, Zhejiang Military District	Major General	Army	2015.2	Guo Boxiong
34	Zhan Jun	1959	Deputy commander, Hubei Military District	Major General	Army	2015.2	
35	Fu Yi	1953	Commander, Zhejiang Military District	Major General	Army	2015.3	Guo Boxiong
36	Zhan Guoqiao	1953	Director, Joint Logistics Department, Lanzhou MR	Major General	Army	2015.3	
37	Dong Mingxiang	1953	Director, Joint Logistics Department, Beijing MR	Major General	Army	2015.3	
38	Zhou Minggui	1957	Political commissar, Joint Logistics Dept., Nanjing MR	Major General	Army	2015.5	
39	Kou Tie	1950	Commander, Heilongjiang Military District	Major General	Army	2015.5	
40	Liu Zhanqi	1956	Commander, Armed Police Traffic Headquarters	Major General	Armed Police	2015.5	
41	Deng Ruihua	1954	Political commissar, Joint Logistics Dept., Lanzhou MR	Major General	Army	2015.7	
42	Wang Xin	1954	Political commissar, Armed Police Traffic Headquarters	Major General	Armed Police	2015.7	

SOURCE: <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中共十八大以来的反腐败工作>, August 3, 2015; updated by the author.

NOTES: CC = Central Committee, CMC = Central Military Commission; Dept. = Department; Lt. = Lieutenant; MD = Military District; MR = Military Region; Univ. = University. [a] Liao Xilong was a former CMC member. [b] Zhang Wannian was a former vice chair of the CMC.

(continued from p. 4)

The anti-corruption campaign in the military also led several senior officers to suicide or mysterious death. For example, Vice Admiral Ma Faxiang (1953–2014), former deputy political commissar of the PLA Navy, jumped from the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of a building in the Navy Compound in November 2014 as a result of “depression.” According to some unverified sources, Ma was scheduled to meet with the investigation team from the PLA Discipline Inspection Commission.<sup>20</sup> Two months earlier, on September 2, 2014, Rear Admiral Jiang Zhonghua, former director of the Armaments Department of the South China Sea Fleet, also jumped out from a high floor of a hotel near the naval base in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province.

It should be noted that the military purge resulting from the anti-corruption campaign is still in process, and one can expect that there will be more arrests of high-ranking officers in the coming months. Yet, one also can reasonably assume that Xi Jinping and the Chinese civilian leadership will be cautious to curb the purges before they become excessive. In fact, Xi Jinping has adopted other methods—some old and some new—to speed up the turnover of the military officer corps.

## Retirement and Reshuffling of Military Elites

Since the late 1990s, the Chinese authorities have effectively implemented a well-defined regulation of age-based retirement for military officers.<sup>21</sup> There is a specific age limit for military officers serving at various levels.<sup>22</sup> Table 2 shows the “age limit” for officers at each level of leadership from platoon to the Central Military Commission.

**Table 2**

*Age Limit for Demobilization or Retirement by Level of Military Leadership*

<i>Level of military leadership</i>	<i>Age limit</i>
Platoon	30
Company	35
Battalion	40
Regiment	45
Division	50
Army	55
Military Region (Deputy)	63
Military Region (Full), including chiefs of four general departments, four services, and three top PLA academies	65
Central Military Commission	72

SOURCE: <http://www.qianlong.com>, November 18, 2002. Excerpted from *Shijie junshi nianjian 2001* (World Military Yearbook, 2001).

In 2000, the Standing Committee of the National Peoples’ Congress passed the Law of Officers in Service, which stipulates that, with some specifically defined exceptions, all

officers at the level of division command (师级) should be demobilized from military service when they reach the age of 50, and all officers at the level of regiment command (团级) should be demobilized from military service when they reach the age of 45.<sup>23</sup> According to this regulation, any generals who serve as deputy chief at the military region level (副大军区级) should retire when they reach 63 years old, and any generals who serve as full officers at the military region level (正大军区级) should retire when they reach 65 years old.

This explains some recent retirements of very senior military leaders, including former Air Force Political Commissar Tian Xiushi (b. 1950), former Navy Political Commissar Liu Xiaojiang (b. 1949), former Second Artillery Political Commissar Zhang Haiyang (b. 1949), former President of the Academy of Military Sciences Liu Chengjun (b. 1950), former Deputy Commander of Chengdu Military Region Ai Husheng (b. 1951), and former Deputy Director of the General Logistics Department Qin Yinhe (b. 1951). All of them serve on the 18th Central Committee of the CCP as full or alternate members. It is expected that many other senior military leaders, with the exception of those who will be likely to obtain seats in the next CMC, will retire as they have reached or will very soon be reaching the retirement age in the coming months.

In June 2015, the Politburo passed a new trial-based regulation on the promotion and demotion of cadres in both civilian and military leadership.<sup>24</sup> This new regulation not only requires the strict enforcement of age limits in retirement, but also calls for the removal of leaders who are incapable, incompetent, or inactive as a result of health issues or other reasons. This will likely pave the way for the Xi administration to remove a large number of military leaders who would otherwise be qualified based on their age to stay in their positions for the near future.

The most important method for Xi is of course the reshuffling of senior military officers between regions, departments, and services. Table 3 presents the percentages of new appointees to the most important military leadership bodies since the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Out of these 91 highest ranking officers, 57 (62.6 percent) took their current positions after Xi began to serve as chair of the CMC. The turnover rates in the four services and three top PLA academies all surpassed 60 percent. The Air Force and Navy have the highest turnover rates. Lt. General Yu Zhongfu (former political commissar of the Nanjing Military Region Air Force), Lt. General Zhao Yiliang (former political commissar of the Shenyang Military Region Air Force), and Lt. General Fan Xiaojun (former political commissar of the Jinan Military Region Air Force) moved to Beijing in July 2015 simultaneously to take over the posts of political commissar, deputy political commissar, and director of the Political Department of the Air Force, respectively. Yu Zhongfu worked as political commissar of the Air Force Shanghai Command when Xi was in charge of Shanghai in 2007. Within three years, Yu changed his leadership posts three times, first to be political commissar of the Jinan Military Region Air Force in November 2012, then to serve as political commissar of the Nanjing Military Region Air Force in July 2014, and finally to become political commissar of the PLA Air Force.

**Table 3**

*Percentages of New Appointees (appointed after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012) in the Most Important Military Leadership Bodies as of August 2015*

<i>Leadership body</i>	<i>Total members</i>	<i>Number appointed after 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress</i>	<i>Percentage of new appointees</i>
General Staff Department <sup>[a]</sup>	8	3	37.5
General Political Department <sup>[b]</sup>	7	2	28.6
General Logistics Department <sup>[c]</sup>	6	3	50.0
General Armaments Department <sup>[d]</sup>	8	2	25.0
Air Force <sup>[e]</sup>	11	10	90.9
Navy <sup>[f]</sup>	11	9	81.8
2nd Artillery Corps <sup>[g]</sup>	11	7	63.6
People's Armed Police <sup>[h]</sup>	15	10	66.7
Three Top PLA Academies <sup>[i]</sup>	14	11	71.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>62.6</b>

SOURCE: <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中国人民解放军总参谋部>, and Cheng Li's database. Tabulated and updated by the author.

NOTES:

[a] includes director, deputy directors, and assistant directors of the General Staff Department

[b] includes director, deputy directors, and assistant directors of the General Political Department

[c] includes director, deputy directors, political commissar, and deputy political commissar of the General Logistics Department

[d] includes director, deputy directors, political commissar, and deputy political commissar of the General Armaments Department

[e] includes commander, deputy commanders, political commissar, deputy political commissars, chief of staff, director of the Political Department, and director of the Logistics Department of the Air Force

[f] includes commander, deputy commanders, political commissar, deputy political commissars, chief of staff, and director of the Political Department of the Navy

[g] includes commander, deputy commanders, political commissar, deputy political commissars, chief of staff, director of the Political Department, and director of the Logistics Department of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Corps

[h] includes commander, deputy commanders, first political commissar, political commissar, deputy political commissars, chief of staff, director of the Political Department, and director of the Logistics Department of the People's Armed Police

[i] includes president, vice presidents, political commissar, and deputy political commissar of the Academy of Military Sciences; president, vice presidents, political commissar, and deputy political commissar of the National Defense University; and president and political commissar of the National University of Defense Technology

According to one recent report released by official Chinese media, as many as 16 senior officers at the deputy level in the military regions were reshuffled in July 2015.<sup>25</sup> For example, former Political Commissar of the North China Seas Fleet Bai Wenqi (b. 1955) was transferred to become commander of the Jinan Military Region Air Force; Commander of the 38<sup>th</sup> Group Army Liu Zhenli (b. 1964) was appointed chief of staff of the People's Armed Police; former Deputy Political Commissar Chen Pinghua (b. 1955) was promoted to deputy political commissar of the Second Artillery Corps; former Director of the Training Department of the General Chief Department Zheng He (b. 1958) was appointed deputy commander of the Chengdu Military Region; former Director of the Research Department of National Defense University Qin Tian (b. 1957) was transferred to become vice president of the Academy of Military Sciences. At the level of deputy chiefs of the army, more than 100 officers were reshuffled in the first half of 2015.<sup>26</sup> Of the chiefs in the provincial military districts who serve on the provincial

standing committees in China's 31 province-level administrations, half were newcomers who were appointed during the first six months of 2015.<sup>27</sup>

While part of this reshuffle reflects Xi's vision of enhancing the PLA's capacity for a more integrated military operation and his desire to promote "young guards" (as will be elaborated in the next installment of this series), another part of this reshuffle was intended to remove the protégés of Xu and Guo, and other potential political rivals. For example, Major General Gao Guanghui (b. 1963), a protégé of Xu Caihou and commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Group Army, lost this important post after the fall of his patron and was transferred to serve as deputy chief of staff of the Chengdu Military Region. Also, three top leaders of the Beijing Military Region who were Guo Boxiong's protégés were all transferred to other places. Lt. General Liu Zhigang (b. 1955, former deputy commander of the Beijing Military Region), a personal assistant (*mishu*) to Guo Boxiong, was transferred to become deputy commander of the Jinan Military Region in December 2014, while Lt. General Huang Jianguo (b. 1955, former deputy political commissar of the Beijing Military Region) and Lt. General Cheng Tongyi (b. 1954, former deputy political commissar of the Beijing Military Region) were also removed from this critical military region that safeguards the capital.

Table 4 shows the current top leadership of the Beijing Military Region. All except Political Commissar Liu Fulian (b. 1953) were appointed to their current positions during Xi's leadership. The appointment of Song Puxuan (b. 1954) to commander of the Beijing Military Region was a surprise to many analysts because Song is not a member of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP. His predecessors Li Xinliang, Zhu Qi, Fang Fenghui, and Zhang Shibo were all members of the Central Committee when they were appointed to this position. This extraordinary appointment reflects Xi's determination to put his own generals in key positions in the PLA and his heavy reliance on senior officers who advanced their careers from the Nanjing Military Region, especially from the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army, which is based in Fujian Province, where Xi served as a municipal and provincial leader for 17 years.

General Song Puxuan, Lt. General Qin Weijiang (b. 1955, designated deputy director of the General Staff Department), and General Wang Jiaocheng (b. 1952, commander of the Shenyang Military Region) all served as deputy commanders of the Nanjing Military Region under Commander Cai Yingting, one of Xi's most trusted friends in the military.<sup>28</sup> Several current heavyweight military leaders advanced their careers from the Nanjing Military Region. They include Director of the General Logistics Department Zhao Keshi (b. 1947), Deputy Director of the General Staff Department Qi Jianguo (b. 1952), Deputy Director of General Staff Department Yi Xiaoguang (b. 1958), Political Commissar of the Navy Miao Hua (b. 1955), Commander of the People's Armed Police Wang Ning (b. 1955), Deputy Director of the General Political Department Wu Changde (b. 1952), Political Commissar of the Shenyang Military Region Chu Yimin (b. 1953), Political Commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region Wei Liang (b. 1953), Political Commissar of the Chengdu Military Region Zhu Fuxi (b. 1955), and Deputy Political Commissar of the Beijing Military Region Wang Jian (b.1955). Among the 44 highest-

ranking officers in China's seven military regions, 14 (31.8 percent) advanced their careers primarily from the Nanjing Military Region.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 4**

*Top Officers of the Beijing Military Region (as of August 2015)*

<i>Position</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Tenure since</i>	<i>Military rank</i>	<i>CC membership</i>	<i>Previous position</i>
Commander	Song Puxuan	1954	2014	General	None	President, National Defense University
Political commissar	Liu Fulian	1953	2009	General	Full member	Political commissar, Beijing Garrison
Vice commander	Han Weiguo	1956	2013	Lieutenant General	None	Commander, 12 <sup>th</sup> Group Army, Nanjing MR
	Zheng Chuanfu	1951	2013	Lieutenant General	None	Commander, Beijing Garrison
	Bai Jianjun	1958	2014	Lieutenant General	None	Chief of staff, Beijing Military Region
Vice political commissar	Gao Donglu	1954	2014	Lieutenant General	None	Political commissar, Beijing Garrison
	Wang Jian	1954	2012 (Dec.)	Lieutenant General	Alternate member	Deputy political commissar, Jinan MR
Chief of staff	Shi Luze	1957	2014	Major General	None	Commander, Hebei Military District
Director, Political Dept.	Zhang Shuguo	1960	2015	Major General	None	Deputy political commissar, Chengdu MR

SOURCE: Cheng Li's database

NOTES: CC = Central Committee; Dec. = December; Dept. = Department; MR = Military Region

Several of them were from the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army, which is now called Xi's "royal army" (近卫军) by some Chinese analysts.<sup>30</sup> This group of Xi's military confidants who served as top officers of the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army includes aforementioned Zhao Keshi, Cai Yingting, Miao Hua, Wang Ning, and Wang Jian. In 2015 alone, several military leaders who had served in the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army received major promotions. Former Vice Commander of the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army Zhang Mingcai was promoted to commander of the Zhejiang Provincial Military District; former Director of the Political Department of the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army Zhu Shenglin (b. 1957) was promoted to director of the Political Department of the Nanjing Military Region; former commander of the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army Ma Chengxiao (b. 1964) was promoted to deputy chief of staff of the Nanjing Military Region; and former Political Commissar of the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army Jiang Yong (b. 1956) was promoted to political commissar of the Beijing Garrison.

Xi Jinping has apparently sped up the promotion process for his protégés. This is particularly noticeable in the promotion of full generals in 2015. According to the regulations governing PLA officer promotion, any lieutenant general will not be considered for further promotion unless and until he or she has held this rank for at least

four years and served as a chief in full military region level leadership for two years. Wang Ning and Miao Hua did not meet these two criteria, as Wang Ning held the rank of lieutenant general for three years and Miao Hua held the rank of lieutenant general for only two years. Miao had served as a chief in full military region level leadership for only one year.

The promotions to the rank of full general for Miao Hua and Wang Ning have made them the youngest full generals in the PLA. Along with Cai Yingting, they are strong candidates for membership in the next CMC. The following installment of this series will discuss the characteristics of the young guards and prospects for and implications of the change of military leadership at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Zedong 毛泽东, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (毛泽东选集), vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang Liang 张量, “Wen Jiabao’s decisive 72 hours” (温家宝高效果断的72小时), Xinhua Newsnet, May 15, 2008, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2008-05/15/content\\_8179273.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2008-05/15/content_8179273.htm).

<sup>3</sup> *Sing Tao Daily* (星岛日报), March 10, 2015; also see its website, <http://news.singtao.ca/toronto/2015-03-10/world1425970399d5474726.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Oriental Daily* (东方日报), October 22, 2014, also see <http://www.boxun.com/news/gb/china/2014/10/201410220950.shtml#.Vb9ncigQifQ>.

<sup>6</sup> “Review of Xi’s remarks to uplift the military spirit on the eve of the anniversary of the founding of the PLA” (“八一”将近重温习近平那些振奋军心的强军话语), Renmin Network, July 30, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Xiangyi 张湘忆, “Xi Jinping personally proposed convening the ‘New Gutian Conference.’” (习近平亲自提议召开“新古田会议”), Renmin Newsnet, November 3, 2014, <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2014/1103/c85037-25961094.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Jing Yue 景玥 and Gao Lei 高雷, “New Gutian Conference: Xi Jinping offers ‘prescriptions’ for the political affairs of the PLA” (新古田会议: 习近平为军队政治工作开“药方”), Renmin Newsnet, November 2, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/1102/c164113-25956877.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ji Beiqun 季北群, “To reshuffle military generals as fast as Mao: Xi Jinping’s ‘foresight’” (军队换将直追毛泽东 习近平“深谋远虑”), Duowei Newsnet, January 10, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-01-10/59629032.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Lin Biao, minister of defense of the PRC, was regarded as Mao’s most loyal comrade-in-arms in the early years of the Cultural Revolution. But because Mao was suspicious of Lin Biao and his son, Lin decided to defect to the Soviet Union. The plane that carried

Lin Biao, his wife, his son, and a few PLA officers mysteriously crashed in Mongolia in September 13, 1971, killing everyone on board. After that incident, a large number of Lin's lieutenants were arrested. For a more detailed discussion of the Lin Biao incident, see Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1996; and Qiu Jin, *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See Deng Xiaoping, "The Task of Consolidating the Army," in *Deng Xiaoping's Selected Works*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984, p. 27; Yü Yü-lin, "The Role of the PLA in Mainland China's Power Transition," *Issues and Studies*, December 1985, pp. 79–83; and Cheng Li and Lynn White, "The Army in the Succession to Deng Xiaoping: Familiar Fealties and Technocratic Trends," *Asian Survey*, vol. 33, no. 8 (August 1993): 757.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion of the reshuffling in 1973, see "The whole story of the reshuffling of commanders of the eight military regions" (八大军区司令对调始末), Sanjun Newsnet, December 3, 2014, <http://www.sanjun.com/dangan/20141203/64136.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Li Gucheng 李谷城, *The structure of the party, the government and the military in Communist China: The largest regime under the rule of man in the world* (中国党政军结构: 世界最庞大的人治政权). Taipei: Shuxin chubanshe, 1989, p. 486.

<sup>16</sup> In a way, Deng's tactics were not new, and they echoed the "law of avoidance" by which mandarins were prohibited from serving in their native provinces and counties, a centuries-old policy in traditional China.

<sup>17</sup> "To reshuffle military generals as fast as Mao did: Xi Jinping's 'foresight'" (see endnote 11).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Wang Jinhao 王锦浩, "The Central Military Commission promotes 10 new generals" (中央军委新晋升10上将), Phoenix Newsnet, August 3, 2015, [http://hebei.ifeng.com/news/zbc/detail\\_2015\\_08/03/4180355\\_0.shtml](http://hebei.ifeng.com/news/zbc/detail_2015_08/03/4180355_0.shtml).

<sup>20</sup> *Outpost* (前哨), February 2, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.qianlong.com>, November 18, 2002. Quoted from the section on China in *The World Military Yearbook*, 2001 (世界军事年鉴). Beijing: PLA Press, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., and also <http://chinesenewsnet.com>, August 16, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted from *Wenhui Daily* (文汇报), August 15, 2003; also see <http://www.sina.com.cn>, August 15, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> The General Office of the CCP Central Committee, "A Number of Trial Provisions to Promote the Mobility of Cadres" (推进领导干部能上能下若干规定[试行]), Renmin Newsnet, July 29, 2015, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0729/c1001-27375974.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Yue Feifei 岳菲菲, "PLA General reshuffling in the Summer of 2015" (解放军2015年夏季将领调整), *Beijing Youth Daily* (中国青年报), August 3, 2015; also see Xinhua Newsnet, August 3, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-08/03/c\\_128085118\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-08/03/c_128085118_2.htm).

<sup>26</sup> You An 佑安, "The military shake-up" (军方换血), Duowei Newsnet, July 7, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-07-07/59665601.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Xiao 王小, "Reshuffling of members of the provincial standing committees representing the military" ("戎装常委"洗牌), Duowei Newsnet, July 04, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-07-04/59664923.html>.

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<sup>28</sup> For the strong ties between Xi and Cai Yingting, see Cheng Li, “Xi Jinping’s Inner Circle (Part 3: Political Protégés from the Provinces), *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 45 (Fall 2014), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Xiang Dan 项丹, “Senior Officers Cluster in Jiangsu and Shandong” (高级将领“扎堆”苏鲁), Duowei Newsnet, May 10, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-05-10/59652510.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Sun Lan 孙澜, “The ‘Royal Army’ leads” (“万岁军”领衔), Duowei Newsnet, July 15, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-07-15/59667471.html>; and Shi Yu 施予, “Reveal the secrecy of the ‘Guards’: The rapid rise of the 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army based in Xiamen” (揭秘“近卫军”—厦门31军团异军突起), Duowei Newsnet, December 12, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-01-12/59629345.html>.