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“The New Chinese Central Military Commission”

Testimony of

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“China’s New Leadership and Implications for the United States”

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the other members of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission for the opportunity to take part in the hearings you are holding today on the topic of “China’s New Leadership and Implications for the United States.” My remarks will focus on the personalities of the new Central Military Commission.

Every five years, the advent of a Party Congress heralds a significant turnover of senior military officers on the Central Military Commission. Every two Congresses since the early 1990s, speculation about whether the CMC chairman will step down after two five-year terms or hold on for a “decent interval” becomes rife, and outside analysts pore over the military appointments to look for evidence of “factional” influence. The 18th Party Congress did not disappoint on either account. In mid- to late October 2012, eight out of ten of the uniformed members of the leading Central Military Commission were replaced. Moreover, the Party’s new general-secretary Xi Jinping, who had been the only civilian CMC Vice Chairman since 2010, also replaced Hu Jintao as CMC Chairman, defying expectations that the latter would stay on for an additional two years. This article examines the reasons for Xi’s “early” promotion and profiles the new members, exploring their backgrounds and possible clues as to their preferences and outlooks.

Surprise, Surprise: Xi Takes Over the CMC

In what even official Chinese media described as an “unusual twist to China’s leadership transition,”¹ Xi Jinping was named chairman of the Central Military Commission at the first plenary session of the 18th CCP Central Committee, ending months of speculation about whether Hu Jintao could or would retain the chairmanship for a “decent interval” after passing the CCP general-secretary position to Xi.² The argument in favor of Hu staying on was primarily historical precedent, since both Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin had maintained leadership of the military for approximately two years after stepping down from their Party positions. Yet Xi had powerful advantages over Hu, including his pedigree as the son of a legendary communist guerrilla (Xi Zhongxun), his longstanding princeling ties to senior military leaders, and his experience

Notes

¹ Yan Hao, “Xinhua insight: Hu praised for voluntarily resigning from top military post,” *Xinhua*, 17 November 2012.

² “Xi Jinping named Chairman of CPC Central Military Commission,” *Xinhua*, 15 November 2012.

as a uniformed *mishu* to Defense Minister Geng Biao in the late 1970s and early 1980s, accompanying Geng on visits by official military delegations to Europe and the United States.³ Structurally, the move will be supported by those who felt that the “two centers” approach introduced unnecessary ambiguity in the chain of command.⁴ Chinese official media went so far as to praise Hu for “voluntarily” leaving the post, and Xi magnanimously offered that Hu’s decision “embodies his exemplary conduct and nobility of character.”⁵ Even though Xi is taking the helm of the CMC from Hu Jintao, the head of the latter’s office, Chen Shiju, has reportedly been appointed head of the CMC General Office,⁶ suggesting some latent Hu influence over the body’s activities.⁷

After Xi assumed the chairmanship, Hu and Xi presented a common front to the troops. They addressed an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission on 16 November, “urging continuous efforts to advance army building and to fulfill the historic missions shouldered by the military.”⁸ Hu lauded Xi, assuring the assembled generals that he could “shoulder great responsibilities of being chairman of the Central Military Commission while uniting and leading the commission to fulfill the great historic missions.”⁹

China’s New CMC Leaders

³ Keith Richburg, “China’s other transition: military to be led by new generation,” *Washington Post*, 23 October 2012, accessed at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/chinas-other-transition-military-to-be-led-by-new-generation/2012/10/23/a8fd9504-19e5-11e2-ad4a-e5a958b60a1e_print.html.

⁴ James Mulvenon, “Party-army relations since the 16th Party Congress: The battle of the two centers?” in Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel, *Civil-military change in China: Elites, institutes, and ideas after the 16th Party Congress*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, 2004, chapter 2, pp.11-48.

⁵ Yan Hao, “Xinhua insight: Hu praised for voluntarily resigning from top military post,” *Xinhua*, 17 November 2012.

⁶ The CMC General Office is a Military Region deputy leader-grade organization, which means that Chen now has the same grade and holds the rank of lieutenant general or major general. It is an unusual step to place a civilian in a military billet. Hat tip to Ken Allen.

⁷ One strange anomaly noticed by Ken Allen: the CMC’s General Office is concurrently MND’s General Office. It is a Military Region Deputy Leader-grade organization, whose director is either a lieutenant general (primary rank) or major general (secondary rank). But as John Corbett points out, having a civilian in the job is not unprecedented. Jia Tingan moved from Deputy Director of the Shanghai party committee General Office—working for Jiang Zemin—to be Deputy Director of the CMC General Office as of 1994 with the rank of Major General. Jia then went on to be promoted to Deputy Director of the General Political Department in December 2007, undermining the argument that he was simply a paper-pushing apparatchik. Hat tip to both of them.

⁸ “Hu, Xi urge army to fulfill historic missions under new leadership,” *Xinhua*, 16 November 2012.

⁹ “Hu, Xi urge army to fulfill historic missions under new leadership,” *Xinhua*, 16 November 2012.

In official protocol order, the new members of the CMC are Fan Changlong, Xu Qiliang, Chang Wanquan, Fang Fenghui, Zhang Yang, Zhao Keshi, Zhang Youxia, Wu Shengli, Ma Xiaotian, and Wei Fenghe.¹⁰

General Fan Changlong, Vice Chairman

Of all of the promotions to the CMC, General Fan Changlong's is the most surprising, because it violates what had previously been considered an ironclad norm in the PLA against "skipping a grade," in this case moving from MR leader to CMC vice-chair and without pausing at the CMC member grade.¹¹

Fan Changlong has experienced a typical Army career, rising through the ranks as an artillery officer before moving to national command.¹² He was born in May 1947 in Dandong, Liaoning Province, and worked on a commune before joining 3rd Company, 122nd Artillery Battalion, 16th Artillery Corps in the Shenyang Military Region in January 1969. Fan joined the Party in September 1969, and spent the next thirty years moving systematically up the ranks of 16th Corps, serving in political positions in the 1970s and regimental command positions in the early 1980s. For ten months in 1975 he attended an artillery academy, and between 1980 and 1982 he was a student at an Army academy. In September 1985, he moved to division-level headquarters and was promoted to deputy commander of the 48th Division, then commander of the 46th Division in September 1990. Fan was elevated to the 16th Corps headquarters in February 1993, serving two years as chief of staff and then five years as Corps commander. In 1998, he came to the attention of senior military leaders with his actions during the military response to flood fighting.¹³ He became chief of staff of the Shenyang Military Region in December 2002, where he served for three years before moving to Beijing as an Assistant Chief of the General Staff in December 2003. Before becoming Vice-Chairman, Fan's last position was commander of the Jinan Military Region, where, because of his political officer background, he also served as head of the MR Party Committee. While serving in Jinan,

¹⁰ "List of Chairman, Vice Chairmen, Members of CPC Central Military Commission," *Xinhua*, 15 November 2012.

¹¹ For the definitive treatment of the critically important PLA grades and ranks system, see Ken Allen's chapter in *The People's Liberation Army as organization: Reference volume v1.0*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001.

¹² Fan's official bio can be found here: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c_131950268.htm, accessed 4 November 2012.

¹³ *HAT TIP TO DANIEL TOBIN, KIM FASSLER, JUSTIN GODBY, "PARSING THE SELECTION OF CHINA'S NEW HIGH COMMAND," CHINA BRIEF, VOLUME 12, ISSUE 22, 16 NOVEMBER 2012.*

he showed a keen interest in military agriculture, including prescribed fertilizers and biological control for plant diseases and insect pests.¹⁴ He led important unit experiments in joint logistics, command structures, and training methods.¹⁵ Fan also reportedly played a key role in the PLA response to the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, personally leading 20,000 troops from Jinan to the scene of the disaster that killed 80,000 people.¹⁶ According to the *South China Morning Post*,

General Chen Bingde, the Chief of the General Staff, revealed in a memoir published in 2010 that he bypassed routine procedures and called Fan at 9.34 pm on May 12, seven hours after the quake struck, ordering two army corps from the Jinan Military Area Command to prepare immediately for a disaster relief mission in the quake zone and "await orders to set out at any time."¹⁷

Politically, he was an alternate on the 16th Congress Central Committee, a full member of the 17th Party Congress Central Committee, and now a member of the 18th Party Congress Politburo.

Fan Changlong's bio highlights the weakness of foreign PLA leadership analysis, since nothing in the raw details of his career explains his meteoric rise to CMC Vice-Chair, except perhaps the recognition of his leadership during both the 1998 floods and the May 2008 earthquake relief effort. In a PLA striving to fulfill the goals of the "New Historic Missions," these types of achievements may have equal or greater weight than performance of traditional military tasks, and "increasingly serve as proxies for combat experience."¹⁸ Fan also overlapped with Xu Caihou and Liang Guanglie when the former commanded the 16th Group Army and the latter commanded the superordinate Shenyang

¹⁴ "Sun Huangtian, others attend PLA agriculture S&T meeting," *Jiefangjun bao*, 26 July 2012, p.1.

¹⁵ Hat tip to Daniel Tobin, Kim Fassler, Justin Godby, "Parsing the selection of China's new high command," *China Brief*, Volume 12, Issue 22, 16 November 2012. For examples of the experiments, see Liao Xilong, "Personally experiencing Jinan Theater's major joint logistics reform," *Jiefangjun bao*, 16 December 2008; and Huang Chao and Xu Hu, "Combine troops level by level, conduct multi-level joint training—an armored division under the Jinan Military Region Tests and perfects new operational methods by using actual troops and real equipment," *Jiefangjun bao*, 11 November 2008.

¹⁶ One of the main tasks of the Jinan Military Area Command, thanks to its ability to mobilize quickly and deploy airborne troops, is to serve as a supporting force for military or emergency missions. See Choi Chi-yuk, "General Fan Changlong tipped for top post in China military commission," *South China Morning Post*, 22 October 2012.

¹⁷ Choi Chi-yuk, "General Fan Changlong tipped for top post in China military commission," *South China Morning Post*, 22 October 2012.

¹⁸ See Daniel Tobin, Kim Fassler, Justin Godby, "Parsing the selection of China's new high command," *China Brief*, Volume 12, Issue 22, 16 November 2012.

Military Region. Yet Fan will be past mandatory retirement age at the 19th Party Congress and therefore will likely serve only a single term as CMC Vice-Chair.

General Xu Qiliang, Vice Chairman¹⁹

Xu Qiliang is a career Air Force officer and pilot. He was born in March 1950 in Linqu, Shandong Province, joining the PLAAF as a student in July 1966 at the PLAAF 1st Aviation Preparatory School. He is the son of late Lieutenant General Xu Lefu, a former Deputy Political Commissar of the Air Force.²⁰ Xu briefly served as a “basic trainee” in the 335th Regiment, 112nd Division, 38th Army, before joining the Communist Party in July 1967. He entered the PLAAF 8th Aviation School in Liushuquan, Xinjiang²¹ in December 1967, graduating from the 5th Aviation School, Wuwei, Gansu, in November 1968 with a senior technical (associates) degree.²² Xu was first posted as a pilot to the 77th Regiment of the 26th Air Division in August 1969, rising quickly to be a deputy commander and finally commander of the 26th Division’s Independent Flight Group (battalion) in May 1976. His promotions continued within the division, including being one of the deputy commanders in September 1980 and the commander in May 1983, interrupted by a six-month attendance in the Senior Course at the Air Force Command College between March and October 1982. From the 26th Division,²³ Xu continued to serve in logical command positions; he was selected as a deputy commander of the 4th Air Corps in Shanghai in May 1984 and then served as chief of staff of the renamed Shanghai Command Post from August 1985 to August 1986.²⁴ In an appropriate move for his grade and position, he left command to attend the National Defense University’s (NDU) Basic Course as a student from September 1986 to June 1988. After his stint in the classroom, he returned to the PLAAF as an acting deputy commander of the 8th Air Corps in Fuzhou, Fujian, before becoming the chief of staff in July 1989 and finally commander of the unit in June 1990. At this point, Xu moved to Beijing, assuming

¹⁹ The details of Xu’s bio can be found here: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-11/04/m_113600838.htm, accessed on 4 November 2012. Special thanks to Ken Allen for the link, and for the detailed footnotes on PLAAF organizational history.

²⁰ Choi Chi-Yuk, “China’s leadership transition feature series—Xu Qiliang; aviator looks set to climb,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 October 2012.

²¹ The 8th Flight School was created in 1967 by merging part of the 5th Flight College and 3rd Flight College. In 1972, it was merged back into the 5th Flight School.

²² The 5th Flight School was founded in Jinan, Shandong Province, but moved to Wuwei, Gansu in early 1966.

²³ The 26th Air Division was created in 1953 at Liuzhou, Guangxi, but it moved at some point to the Chongming District of Shanghai

²⁴ The 4th Air Corps was renamed the Shanghai Command Post in 1985.

duties in January 1993 as one of the deputy chiefs of staff in PLAAF Headquarters and then chief of staff beginning in October 1994.²⁵ Twice during his headquarters stint he attended short courses at NDU, first as a student in the Campaign Refresher Course from September to November 1994 and then as a student in the National Defense Research Department from July to October 1998. In February 1999, Xu concurrently became commander of the Shenyang Military Region Air Force and one of the deputy commanders of the MR itself, which is an MR deputy leader-grade billet. From March to July 2001, he took the “generals course” at NDU. In June 2004, Xu was appointed as one of the Deputy Chiefs of the General Staff, which is an MR leader-grade billet, and was promoted to full general in July 2007. Three months later, he was appointed as the PLAAF Commander and a concurrent Central Military Commission member. Politically, Xu’s memberships in leading Party bodies paralleled his military promotions. He was an alternate member of the 14th and 15th Party Congresses in 1992 and 1997, respectively, rising to become a member of the 16th and 17th Party Congress Central Committees in 2002 and 2007. Finally, with his elevation to the vice-chairmanship, Xu became a member of the 18th Party Congress Politburo.

Xu Qiliang now holds the highest position achieved by an air force officer in the post-Mao era.²⁶ But this move also allows us to discard the popular shibboleth that the second CMC Vice-Chairmanship is reserved for a “political officer.” The most recent Vice-Chair, Xu Caihou, did follow a typical political officer career path, but the previous occupants (Liu Huaqing, Cao Gangchuan, Chi Haotian, et al.) were not. Even if the leadership had wanted to further the Xu Caihou example, none of the three top political commissars in the PLA (General Liu Yuan, 61, of the General Armament Department; General Zhang Haiyang, 61, of the Second Artillery Force; and General Zhang Yang, 61, of the Guangzhou Military Region) were members of the CMC and were not senior enough to succeed Xu Caihou as CMC vice-chairman. However, Fan Changlong’s two-step grade elevation to Vice-Chair would seem to undermine that thesis, unless it was simply impossible to contemplate two two-step promotions at the same time.

General Chang Wanquan, expected Minister of Defense²⁷

²⁵ Xu made a lateral transfer from being an air corps commander to become the chief of staff. They are both grade 5 positions, but the latter has greater responsibilities.

²⁶ Hat tip to Daniel Tobin, Kim Fassler, Justin Godby, “Parsing the selection of China’s new high command,” *China Brief*, Volume 12, Issue 22, 16 November 2012.

²⁷ <http://baike.baidu.com/view/325385.htm>

Chang Wanquan was born in Nanyang, Henan, in January 1949, joining the PLA in March 1968 and the CCP later in the same year. After a few years of soldiering, he was promoted to chief of staff of the 140th Division's training section in July 1970, moving up to chief of staff of the 47th Army's training bureau in the Lanzhou Military Region in March 1974. From February to September 1978, Chang served as chief of staff of the Lanzhou MR Headquarters' Operations Department (second section), and then became the *mishuzhang* of the MR General Office *mishu* section. In February 1980, he returned to the 47th Army, serving as one of the deputy chiefs of staff and then chief of the Headquarters Department's Training Bureau. From May 1983 to September 1985, Chang was promoted to chief of staff of the 47th Army's 140th Division, and then one of the deputy division commanders until August 1990. For the next two years, he headed the Lanzhou Military Region Operations Department, and then assumed command of the 61st Division. From November 1994 to June 1998, he served as chief of staff of the 47th Army, leaving to head the National Defense University's Campaign Education and Research Department. Chang returned as commander of the 47th Army in October 2000, rising to chief of staff of the Lanzhou Military Region. In December 2003, he became chief of staff of the Beijing Military Region, and one year later was promoted in grade to command the Shenyang Military Region. Chang became director of the General Armament Department in September 2007. Politically, he was a member of the 16th, 17th, and 18th Party Congress Central Committees.

Chang Wanquan's appearance on the official CMC protocol list without an assigned position guarantees that he will be appointed Defense Minister at the National People's Congress in March 2013. He is widely credited with the successes associated with the country's manned space program, which is administered by Chang's General Armament Department. Outside analysts predicted before the Congress that Chang would be promoted to the Vice-Chair position that was ultimately awarded to Fan Changlong, but instead he was moved "up" to Defense Minister.

General Fang Fenghui, Chief of the General Staff²⁸

Fang Fenghui was born in April 1951 in Xianyang, Shaanxi. He joined the PLA in 1968, and served for 34 years in the Lanzhou Military Region, primarily in Xinjiang.

²⁸ Fang Fenghui's bio was cobbled together from multiple sources, including: Li Xiaokun and Zhao Lei, "Military reshuffles its major positions," *China Daily*, 26 October 2012, accessed at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-10/26/content_15847863.htm; and <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1032917.htm>.

Among his positions was chief of staff of the Xinjiang Military District and commander of the 21st Group Army. In December 2003, Fang was appointed chief of staff of the Guangzhou Military Region, and was promoted in 2007 to be commander of the Beijing Military Region and elected to the 17th Party Congress Central Committee. In 2009, he was in charge of the 60th anniversary National Day parade in Beijing, accompanying Hu Jintao in reviewing the troops.

Fang is young enough to serve one five-year term as Chief of the General Staff, then potentially follow past patterns and move up to CMC Vice-Chair in charge of professional PLA affairs. His service in three different military regions casts him in a positive light compared with competing officers.

General Zhang Yang, Director, General Political Department²⁹

Zhang Yang was born in August 1951 in Wuqiang, Hebei. From 1996 to 2000, he served as the political commissar of the 163rd Division. In 2000, Zhang was appointed director of the 42nd Group Army's Political Department, and was elevated to political commissar. He was elected as a deputy at the 10th National People's Congress in 2003. From 2004 to 2007, Zhang served as director of the Political Department of the Guangzhou Military Region, eventually rising to political commissar and election as a member of the 17th Party Congress Central Committee in 2007.

Zhang's career is a bit unusual for a GPD Director, since he has only served in political positions in units and has never done a tour in Beijing at GPD headquarters. At age 61, Zhang Yang could serve two terms on the CMC, first as GPD Director and possibly one as CMC Vice Chairman in charge of political affairs.

General Zhao Keshi, Director, General Logistics Department³⁰

Zhao Keshi was born in November 1947 in Gaoyang, Hebei, and joined the PLA in 1968. Until 1988, he moved up the system as an apparatchik in the Army Headquarters training command. Between 1990 and 1994, Zhao served as deputy director and then

²⁹ Zhang Yang's bio was pieced together from multiple sources, including: Li Xiaokun and Zhao Lei, "Military reshuffles its major positions," *China Daily*, 26 October 2012, accessed at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-10/26/content_15847863.htm; and <http://baike.baidu.com/view/41979.htm>.

³⁰ Zhao Keshi's bio was assembled from multiple sources, including: Li Xiaokun and Zhao Lei, "Military reshuffles its major positions," *China Daily*, 26 October 2012, accessed at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-10/26/content_15847863.htm; and <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1033044.htm>

director of the Nanjing Military Region Training Department. From 1994 to 1999, he served as chief of staff of the 31st Group Army. From 1999 to 2001, he was one of the deputy chiefs of staff of the Nanjing Military Region, moving to command the 31st Group Army from 2001 to 2004. Zhao then returned to the Nanjing Military Region as chief of staff in 2004 and assumed command in 2007.

Zhao will be 70 at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, strongly suggesting that he will only be able to serve one term on the CMC.

General Zhang Youxia, Director, General Armament Department

Zhang Youxia was born in July 1950 in Weinan County, Shaanxi, and also joined the PLA in 1968. He is the son of Zhang Zongxun, an original Marshal of the revolution who reportedly fought alongside Xi Jinping's father during the Revolution.³¹ In the 1970s and 1980s, he participated in various episodes of the border war and subsequent skirmishes with Vietnam, and was reportedly wounded.³² He was a division commander in the 13th Group Army, then deputy commander of the 14th Group Army, and then commander of the 13th Group Army in Chengdu Military Region.³³ In 2005, Zhang was appointed one of the deputy commanders of the Beijing Military Region, and then assumed command of the Shenyang Military Region in 2007. In 2009, he was quoted in *People's Daily*, the Communist Party mouthpiece, as saying: "The fires of war are burning throughout the world. In this area, the gap between the Chinese military and foreign militaries is growing by the day. This is a real problem."³⁴ In his position at

³¹ Li Xiaokun and Zhao Lei, "Military reshuffles its major positions," *China Daily*, 26 October 2012, accessed at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-10/26/content_15847863.htm; and Jeremy Page, "China reaches accord on military makeup," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2012, accessed behind a paywall at:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203897404578077844219771274.html>

³² Jane Perlez, "New leaders of military in China announced," *New York Times*, 25 October 2012, accessed behind a paywall at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/world/asia/china-names-new-military-leaders-as-transition-nears.html?_r=0

³³ See the usually reliable Xilu.com biography website: <http://club.xilu.com/xinguancha/msgview-950389-104372.html?PHPSESSID=a78cb23ead24848375566c5fb016e7db>

³⁴ Zhu Sixiong, "New revolutions in military training in new period (high-end interview)—from tough, strict, and live combat and training crack troops through sharpening and smelting—detailed account of this paper's exclusive interview with Shenyang Military Region Commander, Zhang Youxia," *Renmin ribao*, 20 November 2009, p.19.

GAD, Zhang takes over the responsibility of improving the PLA's weaponry and technology.

At age 62, Zhang Youxia could serve two terms on the CMC.

Admiral Wu Shengli, Commander, Navy³⁵

Wu Shengli was born in August 1945 in Wuqiao, Hebei, joining the PLA in 1964. He first attended the PLA Institute of Surveying and Mapping, and joined naval units after graduation. During his navy career, Wu commanded a destroyer zhidui (flotilla), served as chief of staff of the Fujian base, was commandant of the Dalian Naval Academy, served as one of the deputy commanders of the East Sea Fleet, and concurrently commanded the South Sea Fleet as one of the deputy commanders of the Guangzhou Military Region. He became one of the Deputy Chiefs of the General Staff in 2004. In August 2006, Wu became the PLAN commander when Zhang Dingfa died, and did not receive his third star until July 2007 (after he met the time-in-rank criteria); however, he did not become a CMC member until the 17th Party Congress in October 2007. He was the only officer who retained his original position in the changes accompanying the 18th Party Congress. Politically, he was a member of the 17th and 18th Party Congress Central Committees

Outside analysts were surprised that Wu Shengli remained in place and did not become defense minister, but it may be that the current PLAN modernization, which is strongly associated with Wu, is too important right now to be placed in other hands.

General Ma Xiaotian, Commander, Air Force³⁶

Ma Xiaotian was born in Gongyi, Henan, in August 1949, joining the PLA in July 1965 and the CCP in July 1969. His PLAAF career began as a student in the Air Force 2nd Aviation Preparatory School, and continued with his education as a pilot at the 12th Aviation School. After graduation in May 1968, Ma returned to the school as a flight instructor. From December 1970 to January 1972, he was a student at the 5th Aviation School, then left to join an aviation unit where he served successively as a pilot, squadron leader, deputy regiment commander, and regiment commander. In May 1985, Ma became one of the deputy commanders of an air division, and was promoted to division command

³⁵ <http://baike.baidu.com/view/676987.htm>

³⁶ For a much more detailed biography of Ma Xiaotian, see James Mulvenon, "The 'Dawn of Heaven'? A New Player in Sino-U.S. Mil-Mil," *China Leadership Monitor* 24, March 2008.

in the early 1990s. From May 1993 to April 1994, he attended the Basic Course at National Defense University. After graduation, he was elevated to chief of staff and then command of the 10th Air Corps. A Hong Kong magazine asserts that Ma served as a commander during the joint drill of the three services in the Taiwan Strait in 1996.³⁷ In March 1997, Ma moved to Beijing as one of the deputy chiefs of staff at PLAAF headquarters, and was then promoted in August 1998 to chief of staff of the Guangzhou Military Region Air Force. From June 1999 to January 2001, he concurrently served as commander of the Lanzhou Military Region Air Force and one of the deputy commanders of the military region itself. From January 2001 to July 2003, Ma held identical positions in the Nanjing Military Region. In July 2003, he moved back to Beijing as one of the deputy commanders of PLAAF headquarters, and then assumed the position of National Defense University commandant in August 2006. From September 2007 to October 2010, Ma was one of the deputy chiefs of the General Staff for foreign [affairs?] and held the affairs and intelligence portfolio that included managing the military-to-military relationship with the United States.

Ma Xiaotian is in many ways the model of a modern PLA leader, commanding units in his service, serving in regional and service headquarters, and successfully performing in “joint” positions in national PME and the general staff. While he was eminently qualified to lead the PLAAF, Ma also made a name for himself as an articulate and tough strategic interlocutor in military-to-military relationships with the United States, as well as a globally savvy officer guiding the PLA’s increasingly complex foreign interactions. Yet his age prevents him from spending more than one term on the CMC.

General Wei Fenghe, Commander, Second Artillery³⁸

Wei Fenghe was born in March 1954 in Liaocheng, Shandong, joining the PLA in December 1970 and the CCP in January 1972. For 20 years he moved up the ranks within a Second Artillery brigade, pausing from 1982 to 1984 for education at the Second Artillery Command College. Between 1990 and 2001, Wei successively served as chief of staff and then commander of a brigade, leaving in July 2001 to become the chief of staff at the 54th Base. From December 2002 to December 2004, he commanded the 53rd Base, moving to Beijing for a position as one of the deputy chiefs of staff and then chief of staff of Second Artillery headquarters. In December 2010, Wei was promoted as one

³⁷ Yu Qianli, “Profiles of the key personnel in the CPC’s war against Taiwan,” Chien Shao, 1–31 December 2007, No. 202, pp. 54–57.

³⁸ <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1551471.htm>

of the deputy chiefs of the general staff. Interestingly, Wei was the only officer elevated to the Central Military Commission in October 2012 who was not a full general, but was quickly promoted on 23 November.³⁹ This sequence was not unprecedented. According to John Corbett, “The timing and process—promotion of the lone LTG [lieutenant general] to full general about one week after the Party Congress by the newly elected Chairman (or re-elected in 2007) mirrors the 2007 promotion of Chang Wanquan to full general after he was put on the CMC as General Armament Director.”⁴⁰

Wei Fenghe’s career path, commanding a Second Artillery brigade and then a base, is very similar to his predecessor Jing Zhiyuan.⁴¹ At age 58, Wei is also young enough to serve two complete five-year terms on the CMC.

CONCLUSION

The 18th Party Congress witnessed the largest-scale change in PLA leadership in years, but analysts remain divided over the reasoning behind individual choices. Perhaps the only consensus involves the dogs that did not bark; namely, the strong suspicion that GLD political commissar Liu Yuan and Second Artillery political commissar Zhang Haiyang did not advance because of their tainted relationship with disgraced official Bo Xilai. Regarding the winners, however, explanations are still bogged down in outdated notions of faction and loyalty. Specifically, outside analysts were quick to identify five or more of the CMC appointees as loyal to Hu Jintao, based primarily on the rationale that their previous grade and rank promotions had been signed by Hu as CMC Chairman or they had served in the same geographic proximity as Hu or Jiang Zemin sometime in the last 20 years. These logical fallacies are compounded by the resurrection of “field army” explanations for personnel groupings, and the expected but tiresome false dichotomies of “hardliners” versus “moderates.” Yet it is striking that five of the officers chosen for the CMC, like the majority of the new Politburo Standing Committee, can only serve one five-year term before reaching mandatory retirement age, suggesting that some of the choices were short-term compromises.

Although the appointment of Fan Changlong as a CMC vice chair came as a surprise because he skipped a grade, the remaining candidates came from a narrow pool

³⁹ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/23/c_131994985.htm

⁴⁰ Corbett

⁴¹ Hat tip to Daniel Tobin, Kim Fassler, Justin Godby, “Parsing the selection of China’s new high command,” *China Brief*, Volume 12, Issue 22, 16 November 2012.

of officers who had moved up the career ladder and met the required time-in-grade and time-in-rank criteria in key staff officer and leadership billets. In the end, however, there is always some horse trading that occurs based on *guanxi*.