

# Say Hello to the New Guys

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In late July 2012, six officers, two from the People's Armed Police and four from the People's Liberation Army, were promoted to the rank of full general, the highest possible rank in the service. The order was conferred by the presumably outgoing Central Military Commission Chairman, Hu Jintao, but was announced by his likely successor, Xi Jinping. This article examines the backgrounds of these six individuals, assessing whether they might represent new trends under Xi's leadership.

## Introduction

On 30 July 2012, six officers, two from the People's Armed Police and four from the People's Liberation Army, were promoted to the rank of full general, the highest possible rank in the service:

- Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou, 60, the political commissar of the National Defense University;
- Lieutenant General Wang Jianping, 59, commander of the PAP;
- Lieutenant General Xu Yaoyuan, 60, political commissar of the PAP;
- Lieutenant General Du Jincui, 60, deputy head of the PLA's General Political Department;
- Lieutenant General Tian Xiusi, 62, political commissar of the Chengdu Military Command; and
- Lieutenant General Du Hengyan, 61, political commissar of the Jinan Military Command.

Xi Jinping, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, announced the order signed on 28 June by Chairman Hu Jintao of the Central Military Commission on the promotion to the military rank of general and the order signed jointly by Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council and Chairman Hu Jintao of the Central Military Commission on the promotion to the police rank of Armed Police general.<sup>1</sup> The rank promotion ceremony itself was presided over by Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission. Xu Caihou, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, and all members of the Central Military Commission, including Liang Guanglie, Chen Bingde, Li Jinai, Liao Xilong, Chang Wanquan, Jing Zhiyuan, Wu Shengli, and Xu Qiliang.

## What We Know

### ***Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou, 60, the political commissar of the National Defense University***

Liu Yazhou is certainly the most colorful and controversial of the six promoted officers, pursuing a dual career of military service and a prolific intellectual agenda of fiction and nonfiction writing. He was born in October 1952 in Anhui, joined the PLA in 1968, and earned a degree in English language from the Foreign Language Department of Wuhan University. Liu's father, Liu Jiande, was a senior military officer.<sup>2</sup> He was once a visiting professor in Asian language studies at Stanford University in the United States. Liu married party elder Li Xiannian's youngest daughter, Li Xiaolin, in 1979. She is currently the head of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.<sup>3</sup> Little is known of his early military career, but in 1995 Liu was appointed deputy director of the Beijing Military Region Air Force's political department, assuming the director job in 2000. In 2002, he moved to serve as political commissar of the Chengdu Military Region, and was then promoted in 2004 to deputy political commissar of the Air Force. In 2009, Liu became political commissar of the National Defense University.

While Liu has clearly enjoyed a successful military career, he is perhaps best known for his controversial writing and speeches. According to the *China Times*, he "was an award-winning fiction writer in the 1970s and 1980s, although some of his works stirred controversy in China as they were judged to bear a pro-democracy slant and belittle China's military power."<sup>4</sup> During his time in America, "Liu was once said to have boldly predicted that China would be ruled democratically within 10 years."<sup>5</sup> In more recent years, Liu has tackled a wide range of strategic issues, ranging from domestic governance to international affairs.

In 2004, Liu penned an article entitled "Western theory" that appeared to criticize single-party rule by the CCP and recommended democratization, arguing:

If a system fails to let its citizens breathe freely and release their creativity to the maximum extent, and fails to place those who best represent the system and its people into leadership positions, it is certain to perish. . . . The secret of US success is neither Wall Street nor Silicon Valley, but its long-surviving rule of law and the system behind it. . . . The American system is said to be "designed by genius and for the operation of the stupid." . . . A bad system makes a good person behave badly while a good system makes a bad person behave well. Democracy is the most urgent thing, without it there can be no sustainable rise.<sup>6</sup>

In 2004, Liu published an article in the party theoretical journal *Qiushi*, speaking frankly about corruption within the ranks of the CCP. While asserting that the "overwhelming majority of middle- and high-ranking cadres are good, serve the people, seek pragmatic results, and are ethical," it is also true that "cases of serious violations of the law, discipline, and corruption involving a small number of middle- and high-ranking cadres have greatly harmed the image of the party and have caused serious consequences for the

party, the country, and army building.”<sup>7</sup> Rejecting the argument that these are “bad seeds” in an otherwise structurally sound organization, Liu instead argues that the structure itself encourages corruption:

Middle- and high-ranking cadres are a group in which it is easy for corruption to grow. Middle- and high-ranking cadres are in high positions and have heavy administrative power. These cadres are very likely to become the key targets of attacks and corruption by hostile forces and illegal elements. Given the lack of effective supervision and weakness in resistance to temptations, middle- and high-ranking cadres are very likely to become the victims of “sugar-coated shells.”<sup>8</sup>

The tough love continues in his discussion of how these structural problems arise. First, “the administrative systems and mechanisms for the use of personnel are incomplete and ineffective”:

The observation of cadres focuses on professional competence but neglects ethics, focuses on leaders’ opinions but neglects the opinions of the masses, focuses on professional performance but neglects daily living, focuses on superficial competence but neglects potential abilities, focuses on periodic inspections but neglects random inspections, and focuses on qualitative observation but neglects quantitative measurements. . . . Democracy is not sufficiently promoted before personnel decisions are made. Making decisions through collective discussion is done in form only. Decisions are made by a small number of people. This has made it possible for those cadres seeking personal fame and interests, who are speculative, who resort to trickery, who work in a perfunctory manner, and who crave success and greatness to “assume their offices despite their illnesses” and to “be promoted despite their illnesses.” This has made it possible for a small number of corrupt elements who seek vulgar interests, who are villains, who lead double lives, and who are corrupt and degraded to be brought into significant work posts.<sup>9</sup>

Second, party cadres do not continue to study and educate themselves, but instead rest on their laurels and refuse to earn new intellectual capital:

some leading cadres ask others to write articles and reports. These leading cadres do not write articles and reports themselves. They only give spoken directives. *The higher a position a leading cadre is in, the emptier his/her brain is.* They have nothing left but their lip service. [emphasis added]<sup>10</sup>

Third, internal party supervision is ineffective:

Members of party committees are afraid of being mistakenly regarded as out of step and losing prestige in front of their subordinates if these members conduct criticisms of themselves. If a party secretary or a deputy

party secretary criticizes members of the party committee, this party secretary or deputy party secretary is afraid of hurting the enthusiasm of members of the committee. If the deputy party secretary of a party committee criticizes the party secretary, this deputy secretary is afraid of being regarded as ambitious for power. If a cadre criticizes another same-level cadre, the cadre is afraid of hurting his/her friendly relationship with the latter. If a cadre with problems criticizes others, this cadre is afraid of drawing the attention of others to his own problems. As a result, the “Mr. Nice Guy” syndrome is popular. Even when a criticism is conducted, this criticism is aimless, concealed as praise, or offers an ineffective solution. It is very difficult for such criticism to touch on ideology and be used to solve problems. A party committee is not willing to, or does not dare to, criticize and supervise the party committee directly above it. It is very difficult to supervise members of party committees. However, it is more difficult to supervise the “number-one men” in party committees.<sup>11</sup>

While these structural criticisms are not unheard of in China, Liu’s prescriptions are even more forward-leaning, verging on pluralism. He called out “democracy,” which he described as a “crucial issue,” as the only way “to select the right people,” especially a system that was “open, fair, competition-based, and excellence-oriented.” Further, Liu calls for a system that permits cadres to be demoted. He recommends that personnel decisions be based in part on the preferences outside the party itself, telling leaders to “pay attention to the opinions of the public.”<sup>12</sup> To bolster this open governance, Liu calls for greater transparency to the public:

Policies and work related to the immediate interests of the masses should be more transparent and should be open to the masses in the appropriate manner so as to allow for public supervision. The rights of the masses to supervise in accordance with the law should be guaranteed and revenge against those who supervise should be seriously punished so that the masses are brave enough to supervise.<sup>13</sup>

This transparency even extends to a freer press:

The right of the press and media to be informed of events, to investigate events, to comment on events, and to expose events in accordance with the law should be guaranteed so that the press and media will continue to be an effective weapon in fighting corruption and advocating ethical governance.

All in all, a provocative, countergrain set of analyses and recommendations from a senior PLA political officer, especially in contrast to the writings of his peers, which usually see the state media as an extension of the propaganda apparatus and favor internal party discipline over external supervision by people outside the party.

Most interesting, Liu’s writings also occasionally present honest and controversial viewpoints on party-military relations. In 2009, Hong Kong’s *Open* magazine published a

leaked report of one of his internal speeches to mid-ranking officers that raised the taboo topic of how some generals refused to lead troops into Tiananmen Square in 1989.<sup>14</sup> Liu reportedly told the officers that he approved of a decision by two former PLA generals, Xu Qinxian and He Yanran, to refuse to suppress protesters.<sup>15</sup> But Liu also knows when to reef his sails and conform to the party line. Following the Bo Xilai incident earlier this year, in which the former party chief of Chongqing was stripped of his posts for “serious discipline violations,” Liu published an article in the April 2012 edition of the party theoretical journal *Qiushi* supporting President Hu Jintao and promoting unconditional obedience of party orders. In the article, entitled “Strengthening the Consciousness and Firmness of Enhancing Political Awareness, Considering the Overall Situation, and Abiding by Discipline,” Liu wrote “the party’s absolute leadership over the PLA has been the immutable spirit of the army.”<sup>16</sup>

***Lieutenant General Wang Jianping, 59, commander of the PAP***

Wang Jianping began his career as an artillery officer, rising through the ranks in the XX Military Region as a deputy brigade commander (1990–94), brigade commander (1994–96), and finally commander of the 120th division.<sup>17</sup> In 1997, Wang switched to the paramilitary People’s Armed Police, serving first as the commander of the PAP Xizang (Tibet) General Unit until 2000. After that post, Wang moved to the Center and has served in a series of headquarters positions, including deputy chief of staff (2000–2006), chief of staff (2006), deputy commander (2006–2009) and finally in his current position as commander from 2009.

***Lieutenant General Xu Yaoyuan, 60, political commissar of the PAP***

Xu Yaoyuan has been a political officer for his entire career, beginning in units in the Shenyang Military Region. He served as director of the political department of the 67<sup>th</sup> Division in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Group Army from 1993 to 1996, then moved up to the Shenyang Military Region headquarters to run the cadre bureau of the political department from 1996 to 2000. According to a Hong Kong source, Xu returned to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Army at some point to serve as director of its political department.<sup>18</sup> In 2000, he moved to the Center, working first as deputy director of the General Political Department Cadre Bureau from 2000 to 2007 and then assistant to the GPD Director from 2007 to 2010 before moving to his current position as political commissar of the People’s Armed Police.

***Lieutenant General Du Jincui, 60, deputy head of the PLA’s General Political Department***

Du Jincui was born in October 1952 and has also spent his entire career involved in PLA political work. He began his military service in the Lanzhou Military Region, serving in the Xinjiang Military District as a political work cadre and eventually rising to be deputy director of the Xinjiang Military District Political Department. He then moved up to Lanzhou Military Region headquarters as deputy director of the political department, then returned to serve as political commissar of the 21<sup>st</sup> Group Army from 2005 to 2007. After briefly serving as director of the Chengdu Military Region political department from 2006 to 2007, Du moved to the Center, serving first as assistant to the director of the

General Political Department from 2007 to 2009 and then assuming his current position of deputy director of the Department.

***Lieutenant General Tian Xiusi, 62, political commissar of the Chengdu Military Command***

Tian Xiusi has risen through the ranks of political work cadre in the Chinese military, beginning in units in the Lanzhou Military Region. He was first identified as the director of the political department in the Xinjiang Military District's Nanjiang Military Sub-District. Tian then moved up one level to serve briefly as deputy director of the Xinjiang Military District political department from 1999 to 2000 before moving to Lanzhou Military Region headquarters to work as deputy director of the political department from 2000 to 2002. He then returned to the troops to be political commissar of the 21<sup>st</sup> Group Army from 2002 to 2005, and then was promoted to serve as political commissar of the Xinjiang Military District. Since 2009, he has worked as the political commissar of the Chengdu Military Region.

***Lieutenant General Du Hengyan, 61, political commissar of the Jinan Military Command***

Like nearly all of his fellow promotees, Du Hengyan is a career political work cadre. He was deputy political commissar of the 28<sup>th</sup> Army before its disbanding in the 1997–2000 force reductions<sup>19</sup> and then moved to be political commissar of the 65<sup>th</sup> Army from 2001 to 2005. At that point, Du was elevated to work at the Jinan Military Region headquarters, successively serving as director of the political department from 2005 to 2008, deputy political commissar from 2008 to 2010, and then political commissar from 2010 to the present.

## Conclusion

Between the National People's Congress in March and the summer, the positions of dozens of high-ranking military officers across the services and military regions were reshuffled.<sup>20</sup> A series of rank promotions naturally followed. All but one of the six officers promoted to the rank of full general in late July are career political officers, though this by itself does not immediately suggest any conclusion about party-military relations or even the current status of political work within the military. In five of the cases, the officers followed traditional career paths for their specialization, and display no distinctive factional connections or ideological agenda.<sup>21</sup> Liu Yazhou, by contrast, is a special case in many important ways, and his continued promotion through the system does suggest a tolerance or even wells of support for his frank, controversial criticisms of the party and the state of Chinese governance, especially given the brittle defensiveness of the leadership after the Bo purge. My next *China Leadership Monitor* piece will track these trends through the expected changes to the Central Military Commission, which will be the clearest signal yet of the future nature of party-military ties.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cao Zhi, “Central Military Commission Holds General Promotion Ceremony, Hu Jintao Gives Order Certificates and Extends Congratulations to the Promoted Senior Military and Police Officers,” *Xinhua*, 30 July 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Minnie Chan, “Liberal-Leaning Officer Joins Top Brass,” *South China Morning Post*, 1 August 2012.

<sup>3</sup> “Son-In-Law of Former Chinese President Promoted To General,” *Want China Times*, 1 August 2012.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> John Garnaut, “China Must Reform or Die,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 August 2010, accessed at: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/china-must-reform-or-die-20100811-11zxd.html> - ixzz22rkZXISh.

<sup>7</sup> Liu Yazhou, “Focusing on ‘Leading Issues’ and Promoting Clean Government,” *Qiushi*, No. 16, 16 August 2004, pp. 39–41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> John Garnaut, “China Must Reform or Die.”

<sup>15</sup> Minnie Chan, “Liberal-Leaning Officer Joins Top Brass.”

<sup>16</sup> Accessed at <http://www.qstheory.cn/>.

<sup>17</sup> Chia Lei, “Central Military Commission promotes six officers to the rank of general; All were born in the 1950s and had rich grassroots force commanding experience,” *Ta kung pao*, 31 July 2012.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Email exchange with Dennis Blasko, 23 August 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Ma Haoliang, “PLA carries out a round of high-ranking officer reshuffle, affecting the General Headquarters organs, military regions, the Navy, the Air Force, the Second Artillery,” *Ta kung pao*, 21 July 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Following on my *CLM* 38 article on the Bo Xilai affair and the PLA, yet another Bo “ally” in the PLA, Zhou Xiaozhou, who had been commander of the PLA’s 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in Kunming, Yunnan, was promoted in July, once again undermining the gossipy speculation that Bo’s fall would negatively affect the careers of those in his circle.