

The PLA and the 16th Party Congress

Jiang Controls the Gun?

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For Western observers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the 16th Party Congress presented a curious mixture of the past, the present, and the future. Jiang Zemin's long-rumored and ultimately successful bid to retain the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC) brought back memories of party-army relations in the late 1980s before Tiananmen. At the same time, the new crop of PLA leaders elevated to the CMC represents the present and future PLA, possessing high levels of experience, training, and education, and thus professionalism. This article explores the implications of Jiang's gambit, analyzes the retirements of senior PLA leaders and the biographies of their replacements, and offers some predictions about the choice of defense minister and the future course of Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-PLA relations.

JIANG STICKS AROUND

If imitation is the highest form of flattery, then Jiang Zemin has given Deng Xiaoping's boots a real tongue-shine. Recall that at the 13th Party Congress in 1987, confident of his preeminence in the system, Deng retired from all formal positions save one, the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission. His logic at the time was clear. The PLA was still subordinate to party control, but the fresh memory of the breakdown of formal lines of authority during the events in Tiananmen Square told Deng that his continued personal control of the military was crucially important to Jiang Zemin's successful transition to the leadership core. Deng retained his position for two years, relinquishing his party CMC chairmanship at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 13th Central Committee in November 1989 and his state CMC chairmanship at the Third Plenary Session of the Seventh National People's Congress in March 1990.

Leaks from Beijing suggest that Jiang will retain his CMC chairmanship for at least two years, and possibly three.¹ The semiofficial explanation for his move was offered by an article in the People's Republic of China (PRC)-owned mouthpiece newspaper *Wen wei po*, which asserted that "Jiang Zemin's continuing to serve as chairman of the Central Military Commission is conducive to stabilizing the morale of the armed forces and [effecting] the smooth transition from the old to the new generation."² Susan Lawrence of the *Wall Street Journal* asserts that Jiang will now be able to "lend his support to China's moderate policies towards the U.S. and Taiwan," as well as ensure the implementation of the reforms at the heart of his "three represents" concept (see below).³ Willy Wo-Lap Lam from CNN takes a different, more pessimistic tack, asserting that the Politburo supported Jiang's retention of the position because of "uncertainties in the Taiwan Strait," particularly "unstable Sino-U.S. relations and Washington's increasing support for the Taiwan military."⁴ Either way, postcongress coverage of Jiang in the PRC media confirms his continued preeminence. On the November 15 evening news, Jiang was announced first, and he has dominated subsequent media attention at the expense of a virtually invisible Hu Jintao.

While the pattern looks familiar, the results and the long-term implications for the political system could be quite different. While Deng was initiating and overseeing the gradual implementation of radical new norms, particularly age-based retirement, to improve the health of the system, Jiang's move is institutional retrogression driven by unattractive personal ambition. The scrambled party hierarchy, where the general secretary of the party and the ranking cadre of the Politburo Standing Committee is nonetheless subordinate to a non-Standing Committee member as vice chair of the Central Military Commission, throws a spanner into the evolving mechanisms of inner-party democracy, unless rumors are true that Jiang has also wangled a replica of Deng's special arrangement to attend Standing Committee meetings as an ex officio member or at least receive minutes of the meetings.⁵

Jiang and the Three Represents

At the close of the 16th Party Congress, a 14th Amendment was added to the Chinese party constitution, enshrining Jiang's "expositions" (*lunshu*) on the "three represents" (*san ge daibiao*). While Jiang's name does not explicitly appear in the key sentence⁶ ("The Communist Party of China takes Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng

Xiaoping Theory, and the important thinking of the 'Three Represents' as its guide to action⁷), this adoption of the three represents as a set of formal guidelines is the culmination of a long and controversial process begun in the late 1990s at the behest of Jiang and developed by party theoreticians at the Central Party School and elsewhere.

As analyzed at length in my submission to *CLM* 4, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has been one of the strongest institutional proponents of the three represents, and the postcongress lauding of the concept by the newly elected members of the CMC did not disappoint. Personal praise and loyalty to Jiang were in abundance in the military press, and the absence of references to Hu Jintao or the downplaying of his role was striking. On November 17, 2002, this split was highlighted by the *Jiefangjun bao* "roundup report," which first pledged "absolute" loyalty to Jiang by name as chair of the CMC and then merely identified Hu Jintao as the core of the new Central Committee.⁸ The article went on to mention Jiang by name twice more, thanking him for his "great inspiration and encouragement" and pledging to live up to his "expectations." The new heads of the four general departments (Chief of the General Staff General Liang Guanglie, Director of the General Political Department General Xu Caihou, Director of the General Logistics Department General Liao Xilong, and Director of the General Armaments Department Li Jinai) made their loyalty clear, each pledging publicly on the day after the close of the congress to "resolutely heed the commands of the party central authorities and Chairman Jiang."⁹ Other similar meetings had an identical tone, often effusively praising Jiang (most notably the party committee of the Second Artillery¹⁰) and the three represents, with only cursory mention of Hu Jintao.¹¹ The lack of reference in these meetings to General Secretary Hu, who serves as vice chairman of the CMC, was taken by some observers to mean that party control over the PLA has been split by Jiang's retention of his CMC position. Though it is still early, these trends confirm this author's view that the 16th Party Congress was a stunning victory for Jiang Zemin.

SO LONG, FAREWELL

The 16th Party Congress was marked by the orderly retirement of all members of the Central Military Commission over the age of 70, including Generals Zhang Wannian (74), Chi Haotian (73), Fu Quanyou (72), Yu Yongbo (71), Wang Ke (71), and Wang Ruilin (73).

Because of the age limit of 70 for Politburo members, Generals Fu, Yu, and the two Wangs could not replace Generals Zhang and Chi as vice chairs of the CMC. Some Hong Kong sources have speculated that the retirement of so many “relatively young” PLA officers sets the stage for a round of PLA elder politics reminiscent of the 1980s, and this outcome may perversely have been furthered by Jiang’s retention of the CMC chairmanship.

Of the pregress CMC, only three officers, Generals Cao Gangchuan (67), Guo Boxiong (59), and Xu Caihou (59), retained membership, with Cao and Guo both rising to CMC vice chair and Xu promoted to director of the General Political Department. Following the pattern of the last two sets of vice chairs, General Guo, whom one Hong Kong newspaper describes as a “noted military strategist” and “trusted aide of [outgoing Director of the General Staff Department] General Fu Quanyou,” is now the “chief warfighter” of the PLA in the tradition of past CMC vice chairs Zhang Zhen and Zhang Wannian, though continued rumors about his ongoing battles with stomach cancer may elevate the importance of the new director of the General Staff Department, General Liang Guanglie.¹² General Cao is the “chief military politician” in the tradition of Admiral Liu Huaqing and General Chi Haotian and, as discussed below, is therefore the obvious choice for defense minister.

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SAY HELLO TO THE FNGs (FILIAL NEW GUYS)

Forty-three PLA officers, including 26 new names, are members of the 16th Central Committee, comprising 22 percent of the overall body. Of these, three new officers were added to the Central Military Commission: Generals Liang Guanglie, Liao Xilong, and Li Jinai (see brief biographical sketches at the end of this article). All are incumbent Central Committee members and “fourth generation” cadres and are therefore contemporaries of Hu Jintao. Indeed, the average age of the incoming CMC has dropped from 68 at the 15th Party Congress to 63 at the 16th Party Congress, though the average age of the new CMC is

61 if one does not factor in its 76-year-old chairman, Jiang Zemin. The fact that the oldest military CMC member is now only 67 reinforces the “*qishang baxia*” (“above 7, below 8”) principle that was implemented on the civilian side.¹³

Their résumés reveal that the career officers on the CMC share many things in common, in particular professional backgrounds and outlook. First, at least three of the officers have combat experience. Generals Guo Boxiong, Liang Guanglie, and Liao Xilong all saw action in the 1979 war with Vietnam, and Liang and Liao were regimental commanders on the front lines. Second, all have received senior professional military educations. Generals Guo Boxiong, Liang Guanglie, and Liao Xilong graduated from programs at the PLA Military Academy, Xu Caihou and Li Jinai graduated from the prestigious—but since disbanded—Harbin Military Engineering Academy, and Cao Gangchuan studied at the USSR Military Engineering School of the Artillery Corps. In addition, Liao Xilong even studied as a part-time student in a postgraduate program of social and economic development and management in Beijing University’s Sociology Department, manifesting the PLA’s renewed emphasis on “comprehensive” education.

Third, all the officers have served in sensitive regions relevant to either Beijing’s interest in counterterrorism or conflict with Taiwan. General Guo was 47th Army commander under Fu Quanyou during antiseparatist operations in Xinjiang between 1990 and 1992. When martial law was declared in the Tibetan capital Lhasa in March 1989 during Hu Jintao’s tenure as provincial first secretary, Liao was one of the commanders on the scene. General Liang commanded a unit in the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. As for Taiwan, Generals Guo, Liang, and Liao have all served at one time or another as commander or deputy commander of military exercises directed against Taiwan. In 1994, Liao commanded the ground and air forces in taking over the “simulated Taiwan Qingquangang airfield” that was built in Gansu. Guo directed the PLA’s Taiwan exercise in 2000. Liang, Liao, and Li have served in coastal regional commands in either the Nanjing or Jinan Military Region since 1996, where they gained experience with joint operations. General Liang even oversaw the writing of a book titled *Sea Crossings and Landing Operations* when he was commander of the Nanjing Military Region, and Cao Gangchuan and Li Jinai are very familiar with missiles and missile operations. All in all, this CMC is filled with men trained for modern war.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: APPOINTING A NEW DEFENSE MINISTER

A new defense minister will not be formally appointed until the 10th National People's Congress convenes in March 2003, but Chi Haotian's retirement ensures that his term has ended. General Xiong Guangkai's failure to be elected to the full Central Committee resolutely ends speculation about his possible appointment. Xiong was merely elected as an alternate Central Committee member, placing 148th out of 158 alternates. In retrospect, his audacious bragging about his chances to delegations of visiting foreigners should have been a huge red flag, despite his reported closeness to Jiang Zemin and unrivaled position in the intelligence apparatus as the interpreter of foreign affairs. His well-documented lack of respect among uniformed warfighters and his infamous reputation in the United States as a latter-day cross between General Curtis LeMay, Lavrenty Beria, and Fu Manchu sealed his fate. Instead, the odds-on favorite for defense minister is the newly elected CMC Vice Chair General Cao Gangchuan, whose biographical sketch in *CLM 4* highlighted his reputation as "one of the most cosmopolitan and well-traveled of China's military leaders" and predicted that he could "broaden the largely ceremonial role to maintain oversight of the PLA's arms sales relationships with foreign countries," particularly the "key link between the PLA and the Russian military-industrial complex."

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CONCLUSION

The military personnel appointments to the Central Military Commission after the 16th Party Congress confirm the ongoing professionalization of the PLA, as the new CMC is younger, better educated, and more oriented toward modern warfare than any of its predecessors. Postcongress rhetoric in the PLA media about Jiang Zemin, however, raises troubling concerns about the state of party-army rela-

tions in China, particularly the repersonalization of army loyalty. This trend, combined with the PLA's less-than-desultory cooperation with the civilian apparatus during the EP-3A crisis,¹⁴ strongly suggests that the current system is dangerously dysfunctional. This is not to say, however, that the PLA is becoming more politically interventionist. In fact, the opposite is true, as the PLA's institutional and personal channels of influence decline, and the institution continues to withdraw from non-defense-related interests to focus almost exclusively on military affairs and only the most core foreign policy issues.¹⁵ Instead, Jiang's retention of the chairmanship of the CMC raises serious questions about the chain of command, particularly in a crisis over Taiwan, where escalation control is made more difficult by the triangular dynamic between Washington, Taipei, and Beijing.

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE NEW CMC MEMBERS

LIANG GUANGLIE was appointed director of the General Staff Department. Liang was born in December 1940 in Santai, Sichuan Province. In January 1958 he joined the PLA, where he quickly became a squad leader of an engineer company in the Second Regiment, First Division, First Field Army. In 1959 he joined the Chinese Communist Party. In 1960, at age 20, he became the deputy commander of the engineer company and was eventually promoted to commander. In 1963 his rapid ascent through the PLA ranks continued, as he was promoted to staff officer of the operation and training branch of the Second Regiment. Between 1963 and 1970 Liang attended the Xinyang PLA Infantry School and continued in various staff officer billets in the First Division, gradually moving from positions in the regimental headquarters to division headquarters. In 1970 Liang was transferred to the Wuhan Military Command Headquarters, where he initially served as a staff officer in the Operations Department and was later promoted to deputy head of the department. In 1979 he was promoted to deputy commander of the 58th Division of the 20th Army, and he became commander in 1981. He studied at a short-term course of the PLA Military Academy from March 1982 to January 1983. In 1983 he was promoted to deputy commander of the 20th Army, and in 1985 was promoted to commander. In 1990 he was transferred to command the 54th Group Army, and in 1993 he became chief of staff of the Beijing Military Region. He became commander of the Shenyang Military Region in 1997 and was transferred to become the commander of the

Nanjing Military Region in 1999, where he oversaw training and exercises directed against Taiwan.

LIAO XILONG was promoted to director of the General Logistics Department. Liao was born in June 1940 in Sinan, Guizhou Province. He joined the PLA in January 1959 and became a party member in February 1963. From 1959 to 1971 he was assigned to the 145th Regiment, 49th Division of the Guizhou Provincial Military Region, where he worked his way up to commander of the Fifth Company, 145th Regiment. From 1971 to 1984 he was assigned to the 31st Division of the 11th Army, where he initially served as deputy head of the operation and training branch of the 91st Regiment. In 1979 Liao commanded the 31st Division in the war with Vietnam, distinguishing himself with "wise leadership, low casualty rates, and high effectiveness." He studied at the Basics Department of the PLA Military Academy from March 1980 to August 1981. In 1984 he was promoted to deputy commander of the 11th Army and in the same year was promoted to commander, making him the youngest army commander (44) in the entire PLA. In 1985 he was promoted to deputy military region commander of the Chengdu Military Region, again becoming the youngest officer in the PLA at his position, and in 1995 he was promoted to commander and deputy secretary of the party committee of the Chengdu Military Region.

LI JINAI was promoted to lead the General Armaments Department. Li was born in July 1942 in Tengzhou, Shandong Province. He joined the CCP in May 1965 and the PLA in December 1967. He studied in the Engineering Mechanics Department of Harbin Military Engineering Academy from 1961 to 1966. After graduation his employment was put in limbo as he waited for an assignment. From 1967 to 1969 he was assigned to the 253d Construction Regiment, and in 1969 he was transferred to the 807th Regiment of the Second Artillery Corps, where he served as deputy platoon commander until 1970. From 1970 to 1985 he continued to serve with the Second Artillery Corps in various political posts. In October 1977 Li was promoted to head of the organization section of the Political Department of the Second Artillery Corps, and he later became deputy director of the Political Department as well as its organization section chief. In 1983 he became political commissar of a base "in charge of missile operations troops directed against Taiwan," eventually rising to the position of deputy political commissar of the 54th Base, which commands China's ICBMs capable of reaching the continental United

States.¹⁶ In 1985 he moved into the GPD structure, rising to head the Cadre Department of the General Political Department and then becoming deputy director of the General Political Department in 1990. From 1992 to 1998 he served on the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND), ascending to political commissar after 1995. Beginning in 1998 he was appointed political commissar and deputy secretary of the party committee of the General Armaments Department under General Cao Gangchuan.

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NOTES

1. Susan V. Lawrence, "Jiang Will Retain His Post as Chinese Military Head: President Shows He Will Remain a Force Well after Stepping Down," *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2002.

2. "Jiang Zemin's Control of Military is Conducive to Smooth Transition," *Wen wei po*, November 16, 2002, sec. A, p. 4.

3. Lawrence, "Jiang Will Retain His Post."

4. Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Taiwan Issues Keep Jiang in Army Role," CNN.com, November 22, 2002.

5. Lawrence, "Jiang Will Retain His Post."

6. Later in the constitution, Jiang's name does appear during an explication of the three represents: "Since the Fourth Plenary Session of the 13th Party Central Committee and in the practice of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, the Chinese communists, with Comrade Jiang Zemin as their chief representative, have acquired a deeper understanding of what socialism is, how to build it and what kind of a party to build and how to build it, accumulated new valuable experience in running the Party and state and formed the important thinking of the 'Three Represents.' The important thinking of the 'Three Represents' is a continuation and development of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory; it reflects new requirements for the work of the Party and state arising from the changes in China and other parts of the world today; it serves as a powerful theoretical weapon for strengthening and improving Party building and for promoting self-improvement and development of socialism in China; and it is the crystallized, collective wisdom of the Communist Party of China. It is a guiding ideology that the Party must uphold for a long time to come. Persistent implementation of the 'Three Represents' is the foundation for building our party, the cornerstone for its governance, and the source of its strength." See "The Constitution of the Communist Party of China," Xinhua News Agency, November 18, 2002.

7. "The Constitution of the Communist Party of China."

8. Wan Yuan, Hu Chengshan, Wu Xudong, Jiang Boyou, Xu Yingyun, Guo Kai, Gong Xiling, Wang Mingjin, Cao Xiaoming, Shi Zhaodong, Xu Feng, Liu Tianhui, Zhu Peilun, Liang Xiliang, Lang Longxi, Zhou Xupeng, Zhang Hong, Fang Junzhong, Fang Lufeng, Guo Weihu, Zhu Guangzheng, Zhao Heng, Quan Zhixue, Yu Hongtao, Hou Xiaoqin, Deng Hongtao, and Lei Ziyuan, "Vast Numbers of Officers and Men of All Armed Forces and Armed Police Corps

Resolutely Support New CPC Central Committee and Central Military Commission," *Jiefangjun bao*, November 17, 2002, 1.

9. *Jiefangjun bao*, November 20, 2002.

10. Qian Xiaohu, Xia Hongqing, Han Guoxian, Xu Feng, Guo Kai, Shen Jinke, Bao Guojun, Li Xucheng, Liao Weiwen, Liu Guoshun, Xu Qingyun, and Yang Hong, "Units throughout the Military and Armed Police Force Conscientiously Convey and Implement the Guiding Spirit of the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," *Jiefangjun bao*, November 20, 2002.

11. For a sample, see "Major Army Units Conscientiously Study the Spirit of the 16th CPC National Congress, Vow to Realize Leapfrog Development in Military Modernization," Xinhua News Agency, November 20, 2002; "Officers and Men of the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Forces Pledge to Deeply Study and Implement the 16th CPC National Congress Guidelines, Create a New Situation in Building a Modernized Defense and Army," Xinhua News Agency, November 16, 2002; and "PLA, Armed Police Officers, Men Profoundly Study Spirit of 16th CPC National Congress, Vow to Provide Crucial Guarantee for Defense of National Security, Reunification, Comprehensive Building of Well-Off Society," *Jiefangjun bao*, November 14, 2002, 1.

12. Vivien Pik-Kwan Chan, "PLA Faces Upgrade after New Top Brass Installed," *South China Morning Post*, November 16, 2002, 2.

13. Cadres of age 67 and below can be promoted to the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee, while those 68 and older are too old to be considered for membership. For the Central Committee, candidates who are 57 or younger are considered young enough, while those 58 and older are too old to be inducted into the body.

14. See my contribution to the inaugural issue of *China Leadership Monitor*, titled "Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis: A Content Analysis," which can be found pending print publication at <http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20011/20011JM1.html>.

15. On this theme, see my chapter "Conditional Compliance," in *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

16. James Mulvenon and Bates Gill, "China's Second Artillery: Transition to Credible Deterrence," in *China and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Implications for the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, November 5, 1999).