



Corruption in the People's Liberation Army



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Introduction

In late January 2026, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense (MND) announced the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) investigation of Zhang Youxia, first Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and Liu Zhenli, Chief of Staff of the CMC Joint Staff Department (JSD).¹ This investigation impacts the highest levels of PLA decision-making and further isolates Xi Jinping from military advisement.² The removal of Zhang Youxia marks the near-emptying of CMC core leadership, reducing this body from seven members in 2023 to two members in 2026, and the expulsion of the last remaining senior People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers with combat experience from the Sino-Vietnamese conflict.³ The CMC, the People's Republic of China (PRC) top military decision-making body, is now reduced to two voices, one being Xi Jinping in his role as Chairman of the CMC, and career Political Commissar (PC) Zhang Shengmin.¹ Zhang, a PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) general, is the CMC Vice Chairman and secretary of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission (DIC), the PLA anti-corruption investigative organization.⁴

The investigations into Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli signify the removal, expulsion, or suspected disappearance of over 100 2-star and 3-star flag officersⁱⁱ from the PLA for corruption since 2022; of this number, the PLA officially announced only 38 cases. This includes the publicly acknowledged dismissal of 22 PLA 3-star flag officers from an organization assumed to be reliant on approximately 30-35 serving 3-star flag officers at a given time.⁵ If speculation is true regarding an estimated 25 additional 3-star officers who disappeared, this figure could be as high as 47 3-star officers removed since 2022.⁶

The continued efforts by Xi Jinping to eradicate corruption—according to Xi Jinping, the “greatest threat to the CCP”—are impacting the highest levels of PLA leadership. These actions may reflect Xi Jinping's continued commitment to eradicate corruption and toxicity from the PLA, possibly spurred on by growing apprehension that corruption could prevent the PLA from achieving its modernization goals.⁷ Regardless of the motivations, the significant loss of PLA flag officers and the resulting sudden leadership transitions at the top of nearly every PLA theater command and service will have short- and long-term effects on PLA readiness.⁸

Anti-Corruption under Xi Jinping

Xi Jinping, the CCP General Secretary and Chairman of the CMC since 2012 and President of the PRC since 2013,⁹ marked his tenure by an “unprecedented,” “ruthless,” and “extensive and uncompromising” anti-corruption campaign. This strategy pledges to “swat the flies” (low-level offenders) and “catch the tigers” (senior officials) of corruption,¹⁰ while building a culture that adheres to the “three nots” of “not daring to be corrupt,” “not being able to be corrupt,” and “not wanting to be corrupt.”¹¹ In 2012, within 20 days of becoming the General Secretary, Xi Jinping established new regulations to guide official conduct by Party members.¹² These guidelines aim to instill discipline and reshape national and international perceptions of the CCP by pledging strict abidance to clean governance, financial accountability, and living allowance regulations.¹³

ⁱ Xi Jinping serves as the General Secretary of the CCP, Chairman of the CMC, and State President.

ⁱⁱ The PLA only has 1-, 2-, and 3-star flag officer ranks; there are no 4-star ranks.

Throughout his tenure, Xi Jinping has repeatedly called on Party leaders to set an example, “steadfastly implement” anti-corruption regulations, and remove privilege-seeking mindsets and behavior.¹⁴ Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption regulations have continued to drive investigations across all ranks of the PLA since their inception in 2012; however, evidence suggests these investigations have had a significant impact on senior-level PLA officers during Xi Jinping’s third term.¹⁵

According to statistics from the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) [中国共产党中央纪律检查委员会]ⁱⁱⁱ and official CCP and PLA announcements, at least 43 PLA flag officers,^{iv} including some in retirement, were expelled from the Party, removed from their positions, or placed under investigation for corruption since 2022.¹⁶ *Tables 1–5* below list PLA flag officers officially expelled or placed under investigation during January 2022 through February 2026. *Table 6* lists the People’s Armed Police (PAP) flag officers officially removed during the same timeframe.

Corruption Defined

According to the “Regulations on Disciplinary Punishment of the Communist Party of China,” most recently updated in 2023, acts of corruption punishable by discipline inspection committees include violations of political discipline, organizational discipline, integrity discipline, mass discipline, work discipline, and life discipline.¹⁷

This extends the definition of corruption to include a wide range of offenses such as dereliction of duty, abuse of power, and neglect of duty.

Other corruption violations include hosting large parties and lavish, traditional-style weddings and funerals.¹⁸

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Official Investigation or Removal	Year
Zhang Youxia [张又侠]	Gen.	CMC Member, 1st Vice Chairman of the CMC	2026
Liu Zhenli [刘振立]	Gen.	CMC Member, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff Department (JSD)	2026
He Weidong ^v [何卫东]	Gen.	CMC Member, 2nd Vice Chairman of the CMC	2025
Miao Hua [苗华]	Adm. ^{vi}	CMC Member, Director, CMC Political Work Department (PWD)	2025
Li Shangfu [李尚福]	Gen.	CMC Member, Minister of National Defense (MND)	2024
Wei Fenghe [魏凤和]	Gen.	(Ret.) CMC Member, MND, 2018–2023	2024

Table 1: CMC members officially investigated or removed, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026¹⁹

ⁱⁱⁱ The CCDI is also referred to as the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) in alternate translations.
^{iv} This count of 43 PLA flag officers officially removed since 2022 is based on official PRC statistics and news releases; the number does not account for those officers suspected of being removed due to corruption based solely on media speculation.

^v Media speculation suggests He Weidong suffered a sudden heart attack and died in May 2025—possibly related to a suicide attempt. (References: Li Deyan, “China’s Youngest General Chang Dingqiu Reportedly Dies While in Detention,” *Vision Times News*, 15 December 2025, <https://www.visiontimes.com/2025/12/15/chinas-youngest-general-chang-dingqiu-reportedly-dies-while-in-detention.html>; Hu Yujing, “Reports have Emerged that He Weidong and He Hongjun have Committed Suicide, Raising further Discussions about the Brutal Torture Methods Employed by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) against Military Officials,” *People News*, 26 May 2025, <https://www.peoplenewstoday.com/news/en/2025/05/26/1103552.html>.)

^{vi} Miao Hua, a former PLAA officer, became a PLAN officer when named the PLAN PC, 2014–2017 and has retained the naval rank in subsequent positions.

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Official Investigation or Removal	Year
Wang Donghai [王东海]	Lt. Gen.	PC, CMC National Defense Mobilization Department	2026
Bian Ruifeng [卞瑞峰]	Maj. Gen.	Deputy Director, CMC PWD	2026
He Hongjun ^{vii} [何宏军]	Gen.	Executive Deputy Director, CMC PWD	2025
Wang Xiubin [王秀斌]	Gen.	Executive Deputy Director, CMC Joint Operations Command Center (JOCC)	2025
Wang Renhua [王仁华]	Adm.	Director, CMC Political and Legal Affairs Committee	2025
Zhang Lin [张林]	Lt. Gen.	Director, CMC Logistic Support Department (LSD)	2025
Wang Peng [王鹏]	Lt. Gen.	Director, CMC Training Department	2025
Zhang Zhenzhong [张振中]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Chief, CMC JSD, and (Former) Deputy Commander, PLARF, 2016-2022	2023
Zhang Yulin [张育林]	Lt. Gen.	(Ret.) Deputy Director, CMC Equipment Development Department (EDD), 2008-2011	2023
Rao Wenmin [饶文敏]	Maj. Gen.	Deputy Director, CMC EDD	2023

Table 2: CMC functional department flag officers officially investigated or removed, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026²⁰

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Official Investigation or Removal	Year
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Army			
Li Qiaoming [李桥铭]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Army (PLAA)	2026
Ding Laifu [丁来富]	Maj. Gen.	Commander, 73rd Army Group, ETC	2026
Qin Shutong [秦树桐]	Gen.	PC, PLAA	2025
Deng Zhiping [邓志平]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLAA	2024
You Haitao [尤海涛]	Lt. Gen.	(Ret.) Deputy Commander, PLAA, 2016-2021	2024
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Navy			
Shen Jinlong [沈金龙]	Adm.	(Ret.) Commander, PLA Navy (PLAN), 2017-2021	2026
Qin Shengxiang [秦生祥]	Adm.	(Ret.) PC, PLAN, 2017-2022	2026
Yuan Huazhi [袁华智]	Adm.	PC, PLAN	2025
Li Hanjun [李汉军]	Vice Adm.	Chief of Staff, PLAN	2025
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Air Force			
Yu Zhongfu [于忠福]	Gen.	(Ret.) PC, PLAAF, 2015-2022	2026
Ding Laihang [丁来杭]	Gen.	(Ret.) Commander, PLAAF, 2017-2021	2023
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Rocket Force			
Yang Guang [杨光]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Rocket Force (PLARF)	2026
Wang Houbin [王厚斌]	Gen.	Commander, PLARF	2025
Zhang Fengzhong [张凤中]	Lt. Gen.	Director, PLARF PWD	2025
Wang Zhibin [汪志斌]	Lt. Gen.	Secretary, PLARF DIC	2025
Sun Jinming [孙金明]	Lt. Gen.	Chief of Staff, PLARF	2024
Li Yuchao [李玉超]	Gen.	Commander, PLARF	2023
Zhou Yaning [周亚宁]	Gen.	(Ret.) Commander, PLARF, 2017-2022	2023
Li Chuanguang [李传广]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLARF	2023
Li Tongjian [李同建]	Maj. Gen.	Deputy Director, PLARF Equipment Department (ED)	2023
Lü Hong [吕宏]	Maj. Gen.	Deputy Director, PLARF ED	2023

Table 3: PLA service leadership flag officers officially investigated or removed, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026²¹

^{vii} Media speculation suggests He Hongjun may have committed suicide in May 2025. (Reference: Hu, “Reports have emerged that He Weidong and He Hongjun have committed suicide...”)

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Official Investigation or Removal	Year
PLA Force Leadership – PLA Joint Logistics Support Force			
Gao Daguang [高大光]	Vice Adm.	PC, Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF)	2025
PLA Force Leadership – PLA Information Support Force			
Li Wei [李伟]	Gen.	PC, PLA Information Support Force	2026

Table 4: PLA force leadership flag officers officially investigated or removed, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026²²

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Official Investigation or Removal	Year
Eastern Theater			
Lin Xiangyang [林向阳]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Eastern Theater Command (ETC)	2025
Southern Theater			
Li Pengcheng [李鹏程]	Vice Adm.	Commander, PLA Southern Theater Command Navy (STCN)	2024
Ju Xinchun [鞠新春]	Lt. Gen.	Commander, STCN (Former) Vice Director, CMC EDD, 2021-2023	2023
Central Theater			
Li Zhizhong [李志忠]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLA Central Theater Command (CTC)	2024

Table 5: PLA Theater Command flag officers officially investigated or removed, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026²³

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Official Investigation or Removal	Year
People's Armed Police			
Zhang Hongbing [张红兵]	Gen.	PC, PAP	2025
Wang Chunning [王春宁]	Gen.	Commander, PAP	2024

Table 6: PAP^{viii} flag officers officially investigated or removed, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026²⁴

Growing speculation regarding the status of additional senior PLA officials who are missing, or have been dismissed, or replaced but not reassigned, suggests the full extent of the anti-corruption effort may be wider than officially reported. A perceived lack of transparency in official corruption reporting fuels widespread conjecture when a senior PLA leader disappears from public view or misses a key event.²⁵ He Weidong, then 2nd Vice Chairman of the CMC, missed an annual tree-planting ceremony usually attended by senior-level PLA leadership in April 2025, sparking widespread rumors that he was removed from office before the official announcement in October 2025.²⁶ PLAA Commander Li Qiaoming, PLAN PC Yuan Huazhi, PAP Commander Wang Chunning, and PLAA PC Qin Shutong drew attention for missing the promotion ceremonies for their successors in early 2025. Months later, Yuan Huazhi, Wang Chunning, and Qin Shutong were officially expelled from the Party in October 2025.²⁷ Li Qiaoming, on the other hand, who was missing in early 2025, later reappeared but was officially removed from the National People's Congress in early 2026.²⁸ At the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CCP Central Committee (CCPCC), held in October 2025, China observers counted as many as 14 PLA flag officers absent from the proceedings without a known explanation.²⁹ Tables 7–10 are a representative, but not exhaustive, list of PLA flag officers either missing or considered under investigation without official announcement as of February 2026.

^{viii} Data on the PAP leadership is cited for perspective but not included in the tally of PLA flag officers officially removed for corruption.

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Speculation	Year
CMC Functional Departments			
Xu Qiling [徐起零]	Gen.	Deputy Chief of the CMC JSD	2026
Xu Xueqiang [许学强]	Gen.	Director, CMC EDD	2025
Fang Yongxiang [方永祥]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Minister, Vet. Affairs, Deputy Director, CMC PWD	2025
Tang Yong [唐勇]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Secretary, CMC DIC	2024
Zhao Keshi [赵克石]	Gen.	(Ret.) Director, General Logistics Dept. (GLD), 2012-17	2025

Table 7: Representative (not exhaustive) list of CMC flag officers from the CMC functional departments speculated as missing or under investigation as of Feb. 2026³⁰

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Speculation	Year
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Air Force			
Chang Dingqiu ^{ix} [常丁求]	Gen.	Commander, PLAAF	2025
Guo Puxiao [郭普校]	Gen.	PC, PLAAF	2025
Yu Qingjiang [俞庆江]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLAAF	2025
Ma Xiaotian [马晓天]	Gen.	(Ret.) Commander, PLAAF, 2012-17	2025
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Army			
Chen Hui [陈辉]	Gen.	PC, PLAA	2025
Li Zhonglin [李中林]	Lt. Gen.	Chief of Staff, PLAA	2025
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Navy			
Hu Zhongming [胡中明]	Adm.	Commander, PLA Navy	2025
Feng Danyu [冯丹宇]	Vice Adm.	(Former) Deputy Commander, PLA Navy	2024-25
PLA Service Leadership – PLA Rocket Force			
Xu Xisheng [徐西盛]	Gen.	PC, PLARF	2025
Xu Zhongbo [徐忠波]	Gen.	PC, PLARF	2023
Liu Guangbin [刘光斌]	Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLARF	2023
Wu Guohua [吴国华]	Lt. Gen.	(Ret.) Deputy Commander, PLARF, 2016-22	2023
PLA Force Leadership – PLA Strategic Support Force			
Ju Qiansheng [巨乾生]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)	2023

Table 8: Representative list (not exhaustive) of PLA flag officers speculated as missing or under investigation as of Feb. 2026³¹

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Speculation	Year
Liu Qingsong [刘青松]	Gen.	PC, PLA ETC	2025
Wang Zhongcai [王仲才]	Vice Adm.	Commander, Eastern Theater Command Navy (ETCN)	2025
Wu Yanan [吴亚男]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Southern Theater Command (STC)	2025
Huang Ming [黄铭]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Northern Theater Command (NTC)	2025
Wang Haijiang [汪海江]	Gen.	Commander, PLA Western Theater Command (WTC)	2025
Li Fengbiao [李凤彪]	Gen.	PC, PLA WTC	2026
Wang Qiang [王强]	Gen.	Commander, PLA CTC	2025
Xu Deqing [徐德清]	Gen.	PC, PLA CTC	2025

Table 9: Representative list (not exhaustive) of PLA Theater Command flag officers speculated as missing or under investigation as of Feb. 2026³²

^{ix} Media speculation suggests Chang Dingqiu died from a heart attack while in liuzhi [留置] detention for a corruption investigation. (Reference: Li “China’s Youngest General Chang Dingqiu Reportedly Dies While in Detention.”)

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Speculation	Year
PLA Academy of Military Science			
Yang Xuejun [杨学军]	Gen.	President, PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS)	2025
Ling Huanxin [凌焕新]	Gen.	PC, PLA AMS	2025

Table 10: Representative list (not exhaustive) of PLA Academy of Military Science flag officers speculated as missing or under investigation, as of Feb. 2026³³

Discipline Inspection Organizations

The CCDI is the Party's primary anti-corruption organization, subordinate to the CCPCC.³⁴ Reestablished by the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978,³⁵ the CCDI is tasked with upholding CCP regulations, inspecting the implementation of the Party vision, ensuring strict adherence to Party regulations and decisions, and leading anti-corruption efforts.³⁶ The previous subordination of the CCDI to the Politburo for permission to investigate senior-level cases effectively blocked corruption investigations against key PLA and civilian leaders, particularly during the early 2000s. Under this structure, investigations of senior-level leadership required Politburo approval and investigations of members of the Politburo required approval from a panel of incumbent and retired leaders.³⁷ Regulations formalized under Xi Jinping aim to decouple the CCDI from Party influence.

The highest State anti-corruption organization, the National Supervisory Commission (NSC) [国家监察委员会], works with the CCDI to investigate corruption. The NSC, formed in 2018 from merging roles of the Ministry of Supervision and the National Bureau of Corruption Prevention with the Supreme People's Procuratorate's anti-corruption efforts, is subordinate to the National People's Congress.³⁸

The primary anti-corruption organization in the PLA is the CMC DIC [中央军委纪律检查委员会], created by the CMC shortly following the restoration of the CCDI. It was officially named the CMC DIC in November 1980 and later renamed the CMC Discipline Inspection Department in June 1990.³⁹ The current CMC DIC, established in December 2015 under Xi Jinping, is an autonomous commission directly reporting to the CMC.⁴⁰ This new iteration of the CMC DIC operates under both the CMC and the CCDI and includes representation at all levels of the PLA.⁴¹ Generally, the CMC DIC inspects cases to determine if it should be a judiciary or military investigation. In most cases against high-ranking PLA officers, the investigation involves both the CMC DIC and CCDI.⁴² The CCDI and CMC DIC appear to work closely together, with Zhang Shengmin having dual oversight of the military and civilian disciplinary systems as both the Secretary of the CMC DIC and Deputy Secretary of the CCDI since 2017 (while also serving as a CMC member and currently the CMC Vice Chairman).⁴³

The Xi Jinping-era reforms strengthened the legal framework for anti-corruption investigations by providing stricter guidance for Party enforcement.⁴⁴ The CCDI implements the "Regulations on Disciplinary Actions of the Communist Party of China," revised under Xi Jinping in 2015, 2018, and 2023.⁴⁵ These regulations codify 158 articles on Party discipline violations and rules for the application of disciplinary actions.⁴⁶ The CMC DIC augments these guidelines with an additional regulation, the "Code of Conduct for Party Members and Cadres in the Military Discipline Inspection and Supervision System," released in March 2020, which annotates 52 prohibited behaviors for PLA members.⁴⁷

Evolution of Corruption in the PLA

Corruption in the PLA expanded out of the political reforms of the 1980s, growing as Deng Xiaoping's^x "opening-up" policy and associated market reforms transitioned the Chinese economy from a socialist, centrally planned system to a market-driven model.⁴⁸ In 1995, private enterprise accounted for only 5.3 percent of China's national output. By 2010, the Chinese private sector had grown to the second-largest economy in the world.⁴⁹ The extensive and rapid market growth and flourishing commercialization in the 1980s and 1990s fostered an evolution of corruption.⁵⁰ PLA members, not immune to its influence, often orchestrated widespread smuggling and other legally prohibited favors.⁵¹

For nearly two decades after the Sino-Vietnamese border conflict, the PLA encouraged its officials to participate in the civilian economy due to lagging military budgets, which furthered opportunities for corruption. During the 1980s, costs for commodities in China increased 90 percent while the military budget only increased 25 percent.⁵⁷ Declining PLA funding and the inability of the PLA to meet rising expense requirements intensified commercial activity within the PLA. By 1994, the PLA owned and operated over 10,000 enterprises, most related to food, equipment maintenance, transportation, mining, services, and day-to-day provisions. The majority of these were managed by the CMC General Logistics Department (GLD) and its affiliated local units. At the same time, there were individually owned PLA businesses, operated by military units or the relatives of military members, and joint ventures with "domestic and foreign partners." These efforts, originally designed to "serve the military and promote self-sufficiency," opened opportunities for corruption.⁵⁸

Guanxi [关系]

Guanxi, an aspect of Chinese culture, has many definitions including "tight, close-knit networks,"⁵² "long-term cooperation among business partners,"⁵³ "conditional relationships based on the resource exchanges,"⁵⁴ "social connections," "particularistic ties," and "personal networks."⁵⁵ Guanxi is not equal to bribery and corruption, but rather guanxi is a socially normed system of relationships that creates opportunity for bribery and corruption in certain environments such as a hybrid socialist economy.⁵⁶

The Chinese transition from a centralized state system to a competitive model also created opportunities for corruption in the defense industry, compounded by lagging acquisition policies and an influx of billions of dollars into the defense budget for modernization campaigns following the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident and the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996).⁵⁹ A general lack of institutional checks and balances, with minimal budget transparency and little government accountability with regards to both operations and finances, grew corruption across the PLA.⁶⁰ The status of the state-owned-

^x Deng Xiaoping [邓小平] was a powerful figure in the PRC from the late 1970s until the 1990s, credited with transforming China to a market-driven economy. A former CCP General Secretary from 1954 to 1966, he later returned to become the Chairman of the CCP Central Advisory Commission and Chairman of the CMC during the 1980s. In the late 1960s, Deng was removed from the Party under Mao Zedong and then later reinstated as a Deputy Premier in 1973. In July 1975, he became Vice Chairman of the CCPCC, a member of the Politburo, and Chief of the General Staff. After a second brief removal from leadership, Deng returned to his previous posts by July 1977. Deng is credited with restoring domestic stability and economic growth, while also growing Chinese ties to the world economy. (Reference: "Deng Xiaoping," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15 Feb 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Deng-Xiaoping>.)

enterprise (SOE) chief executives within the Party hindered oversight of defense industry organizations. PLA officers assigned to monitor defense SOEs experienced conflicts of interest, with the SOEs directly responsible for paying the PLA oversight officers. Additionally, these PLA officials would often stay at the same SOE for an extended period of time and frequently secured employment at the same organization after retirement from the military.⁶¹ Vague or simplistic contracts between the PLA and SOEs, often lacking specific technical obligations, also created obstacles to oversight of the defense industry.⁶² Other areas that honed corruption included funds management and construction work.⁶³ By the time Xi Jinping came into office in 2012, graft was rampant in the PLA with the defense industry thriving.⁶⁴

Internal conditions within the PLA during this timeframe also cultivated corruption. From the early 1980s through the 2000s, PLA pay and benefits generally lagged civilian levels while the PLA operated under almost absolute immunity from external oversight, incentivizing the spread of corruption throughout the PLA.⁶⁸ Lower-level corruption involved cases of parking in illegal spaces, privatizing military-assigned housing to sell on the open market, using military plates on personal vehicles to avoid tolls, obtaining free gasoline, and speeding through traffic without consequences. Bribery and graft became commonplace, and the buying and selling promotions, positions, and enrollment in PLA-affiliated schools grew as an understood requirement.⁶⁹ This practice thrived,⁷⁰ with media reports of newcomers paying as much as \$16,000 to pass the PLA entrance exam.⁷¹ According to research by Peng Wang of the University of Hong Kong, published in 2016 in *China Quarterly*, at least one retired PLA Maj. Gen. commented that essential criteria for recruitment and promotion during the early 2000s was the candidate's strength of personal connections, *guanxi* [关系], and ability to make bribery payments.⁷²

Anti-corruption Efforts, 1980-2012

The three decades leading up to the Xi Jinping era included periodic anti-corruption efforts, with minimal long-standing results. From the 1980s through the 2000s, Chinese leadership announced frequent ad-hoc, often perceived as political, anti-corruption campaigns; however, a lack of solid, institutionalized efforts persisted.⁷³ From the 1990s to 2012, the PRC enacted over one thousand anti-corruption regulations and major policies, more than doubling the number of laws from 1998 (249 regulations) to 2007 (542 regulations).⁷⁴ Efforts to curb corruption resulted in numerous anti-corruption drives, averaging one every two years, but most rarely made significant impact.⁷⁵

Variances in Corruption Reporting

*Corruption statistics are inherently challenging to track and even more difficult to use in drawing inferences, due to the very nature of corruption being an illegal activity⁶⁵ and variances of reporting methods over time.⁶⁶ Data trends may be skewed by the level of leadership support for anti-corruption efforts during the period of review, modifications to corruption regulations, and changes to resourcing of investigatory agencies. For example, a review of PRC corruption rates published in *China Quarterly* in 2012, indicated notable peaks in corruption cases during the 1990s aligned with periodic anti-corruption campaigns of that timeframe. Likewise, the number of cases dropped by 50 percent between 1997 and 1998, probably reflecting a regulation change which increased the amount of money involved for punishable corruption cases. This suggests that neither of these instances reflected actual changes to corruption rates, only statistical reactions to differing anti-corruption efforts.⁶⁷*

Chinese leaders before Xi Jinping recognized the growing threat of corruption within the Party and its implications for PLA readiness. In the 1990s, Admiral Liu Huaqing, Vice Chairman of the CMC from 1993 to 1998 and considered the “father of the modern Chinese navy,” expressed concern about the negative impact of corruption on PLA readiness.⁷⁶ Jiang Zemin, General Secretary of the CCP from 1989 to 2002, charged the CCP^{xi} to continue its commitment to fighting corruption at the 16th National Congress of the CCP in 2002.⁷⁷ Likewise, Hu Jintao, General Secretary from 2002 to 2012, noted in his Report to the 17th National Congress of the CCP in 2007 that “undesirable behavior” existed in a small number of Party leaders and called for development of both corruption punishment and prevention efforts, citing anti-corruption efforts as critical to Party survival.⁷⁸

The rates of Party members punished for corruption varied significantly from the 1980s through 2012. A sharp increase in the prosecution of Party members for corruption occurred from December 2004 to November 2005, nearly quadrupling the number of criminally prosecuted corruption cases, based on a review of CCDI data since 1982 by Minxin Pei published in 2008.⁷⁹ This spike occurred during the leadership transition between Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, suggesting potential for political motivation or alternatively, a revived interest in anti-corruption efforts backed by new leadership commitments to a tougher stance.⁸⁰ That said, the number of Party members prosecuted the following year, in 2006, again declined significantly, falling below the rate observed in 1997 through 2003.⁸¹

During his tenure, Hu Jintao pledged to comprehensively address corruption by emphasizing prevention and punishment.⁸² The Party reformed the defense procurement system, while also increasing transparency. And, in 2011, the PLA issued a version of the CCP regulations regarding ethics and integrity, prohibiting the acceptance of gifts and other arrangements that could interfere with official duties.⁸³ Similar to Xi Jinping’s messaging in the subsequent decade, Hu Jintao stated that all those who are corrupt should be severely punished in accordance with the law.⁸⁴

There were few investigations of senior-level PLA leadership during the 2000s. Maj. Gen. Ji Shengde, Director of the PLA General Staff Department Military Intelligence Department and deputy director of China’s anti-corruption efforts, was arrested in 2000 for his role in a Xiamen smuggling case.⁸⁵ Vice Admiral Wang Shouye, a PLAN Deputy Commander, was arrested in 2006 and sentenced to death (later commuted to life imprisonment) for embezzling 160 million yuan^{xii} of public funds.⁸⁶

By the time Xi Jinping became CMC Chairman, reports suggest that the PLA was “riddled with corruption.”⁸⁷ Hu Jintao’s outgoing report to the 18th National Congress of the CCP in 2012 labeled corruption as a “serious challenge.”⁸⁸ At the start of his tenure, Xi Jinping expressed concern about widespread corruption among PLA leadership and declared that the PLA “completely lacked fighting capacity” and was “totally corrupt.”⁸⁹

^{xi} (Full coverage available at cctv.cn/english/special/STmeeting/SP10180103/index.shtml)

^{xii} Approximately \$22.6 million USD at the time.

Anti-Corruption Policy under Xi Jinping, 2012-2025

Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign started almost immediately upon taking office, pairing consistent policy announcements with swift action. At the 18th National Congress of the CCP in 2012, Xi Jinping tasked the Party to be fully committed to “catching tigers” and “swatting the flies” to eliminate corruption, the “greatest threat” to the CCP.⁹⁰ Xi Jinping instituted the “Eight Point Regulations” in 2012 as a guide for official Party conduct and to remove corrupt mindsets and behavior, calling on Party leaders to set the example and “steadfastly implement” the new requirements.⁹¹ These were formally adopted in October 2017 as the “Eight Point Decision on Improving Party and Government Conduct” during the 19th National Congress of the CCP.⁹²

Initially discussed following the 18th National Congress of the CCP, held in November 2012, the “Ten Regulations” (also known as the “Ten Clarifications”) were formally established in the “Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military [习近平强军思想]” during the 19th National Congress of the CCP in October 2017.⁹³ The CMC later issued a guide in May 2019 for understanding “Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military,” titled “Ten Provisions of the Central Military Commission on Strengthening the Construction of its Own Work Style.”⁹⁴ As the anti-corruption investigations of senior-ranking PLA officers intensified over the past three years, the Party continues its education and implementation of the “Eight Point Regulations” and the “Eleven Regulations.” Xi Jinping consistently cites corruption as the “greatest threat” to the Party and calls for “relentless persistence” to implement effective oversight and investigate corruption.⁹⁵

CCPCC's “Eight Point Decision on Improving Party and Government Conduct [中央八项规定]”

The “Eight Point Regulations” (also referred to as the “Eight Provisions”) encourage Party leaders to connect with the public by living, working, and listening at the grassroots level. These regulations specifically aim to eliminate the “Four Malfeasances [四风]”⁹⁶ (also referred to as the “Four Winds”⁹⁷): formalism [形式主义], bureaucracy [官僚主义], hedonism [享乐主义], and extravagance [奢靡之风].⁹⁸ Examples of this include restricting ceremonial pageantry such as welcome banners and lavish banquets, minimizing official overseas travel, and reducing public inconveniences such as the use of traffic controls to ease senior leader vehicle travel. The regulations also emphasize the importance of honest governance, guiding senior leaders to follow all regulations on housing, vehicle allocation, and living conditions.⁹⁹ In addition to the “Eight Point Regulations,” the PLA also codified the CMC's “Ten Regulations.”¹⁰⁰

CMC's “Ten Regulations [军委十项规定]”

The CMC's “Ten Regulations,” expanded to the “Eleven Regulations” in 2024, call for strengthening the PLA. The regulations cite absolute Party leadership over the military, stress PLA abidance of law-based governance, and enforce ethics and discipline to eliminate corruption. The “Ten Regulations” also direct enhancement of military leadership development programs and talent building efforts. Additionally, the regulations codify PLA modernization and development principles to build sound strategies and integrate strategic capabilities, while also encouraging new thinking and innovation. Functionally, the requirements also call for improved logistics services and upgraded weaponry and equipment.¹⁰¹

Reforms to PLA Defense Procurement

Corruption related to defense procurement persists under Xi Jinping, exacerbated by lagging acquisition policies, lack of transparency and oversight, and a push for military modernization allotting billions of dollars towards the PLA.¹⁰² PLA acquisitions programs have continued to evolve since 2012 to both streamline modernization efforts and enhance oversight and anti-corruption measures. The General Armament Department (GAD) [中国人民解放军总装备部] lost much of its former responsibilities for direct oversight of PLA procurement programs when the PLA reorganized in 2015.^{xiii} Under this reform, the PLA placed operational control in newly formed joint theater commands, resulting in the services becoming responsible for “organizing, training, and equipping” the PLA.¹⁰³ The GAD, now with a more limited sphere of influence, was rebranded as the Equipment Development Department (EDD) [中央军委装备发展部] to focus on centralized management of the PLA procurement system and joint matters with effects across the PLA. The EDD delineates military-wide standards for equipment, sets regulations for weapons testing and evaluation, and establishes the overall “PLA Weapons Equipment Development Strategy.”¹⁰⁴

Multiple policy changes initiated before and early in Xi Jinping’s tenure focused on anti-corruption and enhanced oversight for defense research, production, procurement, and construction projects.¹⁰⁵ The PLA established an internal auditing group in 2012, focused on monitoring projects involving large sums of money, including construction projects, housing, and military hospitals. This enabled the PLA to focus on strengthening auditing practices, accounting procedures, and regulations.¹⁰⁶ The Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP in 2013 announced a major defense industry overhaul, approved at the CMC Working Conference on Reform in November 2015,¹⁰⁷ under which the defense industry consolidated major state-owned firms and reformed scientific institutes.¹⁰⁸ In November 2021, Xi Jinping signed the “Regulations on Ordering Military Equipment [军队装备订购规定],” which outlines procurement processes, standardizes basic requirements, and builds a system of checks and balances throughout the acquisition process.¹⁰⁹ In July 2024, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the CCP published the “Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization,” which continues the effort to reform PLA defense acquisition program and instill further anti-corruption efforts.¹¹⁰

PLA Senior Officer Corruption by the Numbers

The volume of PLA senior officials implicated in corruption investigations since 2012 indicates the extent to which Xi Jinping is willing to enforce his long-term commitment to a zero-tolerance anti-corruption policy. The willingness to investigate senior-level offenders, including retired flag officers, and those who were terminally ill, marks a stark change from previous anti-corruption campaigns that generally afforded these categories a level of immunity.¹¹¹ While precise numbers are difficult to determine, it is possible that well over 160 PLA senior officers have been removed from their positions since 2012.¹¹² By the end of October 2017, marking the end of Xi Jinping’s first term, media reports suggested that

^{xiii} The General Armament Department was established in 1998 to be the PLA’s primary acquisition organization, directly subordinate to the CMC. (Source: Tai Ming Cheung, “Strengths and Weaknesses of China’s Defense Industry and Acquisition System and Implications for the United States,” *Naval Postgraduate School*, 25 June 2018, <https://dair.nps.edu/bitstream/123456789/2724/1/UCSD-AM-18-218.pdf>).

corruption led to the expulsion of at least 45 and as many as 60 PLA flag officers.¹¹³ These statistics starkly contrast Hu Jintao's second term, 2008 to 2012, where only six senior-level leaders across the CCP, including both PLA and civilian officials, were investigated for corruption.¹¹⁴

Three early cases of PLA flag officers removed for corruption under Xi Jinping—Gu Junshan, Xu Caihou, and Guo Boxiong—represented, at the time, the highest-ranking PLA officials expelled for corruption since 1978 and the first instance in which the highest levels of retired PLA officers faced corruption charges.¹¹⁵ Gu Junshan, Deputy Director of the General Logistics Department (GLD), was arrested in 2012 for being part of a promotion racket, believed to have sold hundreds of PLA commissions, and for receiving “massive kickbacks” from real estate developers.¹¹⁶ Xu Caihou, a retired CMC Vice Chairman, was arrested and placed under investigation for bribery in connection with promotions in 2014.¹¹⁷ He was the first CMC Vice Chairman removed for corruption since 1978.¹¹⁸ Additionally, Xu Caihou, who died of cancer in 2015 before his trial, was expelled from the Party while undergoing medical treatment.¹¹⁹ Guo Boxiong, retired CMC Vice Chairman, notably the other CMC Vice Chairman during Hu Jintao's tenure, was arrested in 2015 for bribery and received a life sentence following the investigation.¹²⁰

Additional anticorruption cases from Xi Jinping's first two terms include Zhang Yang, head of the CMC PWD, and Fang Fenghui, Chief of Staff of the CMC Joint Staff.¹²² Zhang Yang was accused of illegally obtaining large amounts of property and bribery, according; he committed suicide in 2017 while under investigation.¹²³ Fang Fenghui was sentenced to life in jail in 2019 for unspecified corruption, speculated in the media to involve reselling military land for personal profit.¹²⁴

In contrast to his first and second terms, the number of senior PLA officials investigated for corruption during Xi Jinping's third term may include over 100 2-star and 3-star flag officers.¹²⁵ The effects of this suggest a high rate of turnover in the majority of key PLA senior leadership positions. As of late 2024, observers counted 24 critical PLA 3-star flag officer roles: the two CMC Vice Chairmen, the Minister of National Defense, the Chief of the JSD, the Director of the PWD, the secretary of the DIC, the four service component commanders and PCs, and the commanders and PCs of the five theater commands.¹²⁶ Since the start of 2025, ten PLA senior officers in these positions were officially announced as expelled or under investigation, with at least an additional 12 rumored to be under investigation. This implies that the PLA may have experienced a 41 to 91 percent turnover rate in the top 24 critical PLA 3-star flag officer roles during the past year.

3-Star Flag Officer Impact

As of June 2004, scholars estimated that there were 32 current 3-star flag officers in the PLA.¹²¹ Since the start of 2025, 14 of the 3-star officers holding these positions were officially removed or placed under investigation, while at a minimum an additional 16 are rumored to be under investigation. This suggests that 44 to 94 percent of the PLA 3-star flag officers were removed or placed under investigation during this timeframe.

Rippling Effects Across the PLA

Unequal levels of PLA corruption investigations across the services may be indicative of the snowballing nature of corruption cases, often uncovering new and connected cases

during the course of an investigation. Corruption has led to the removal of PLA senior officers in every theater command and across every service; however, data suggests a heavy spotlight on PLARF officials over the past three years, a lesser focus on PLAN and PLAA leaders, and a minimal impact on PLAAF generals. These unequal rates may also reflect Xi Jinping's loss of confidence across each service as the corruption investigations progress.

This emphasis on the PLARF leadership corruption appears to have grown from initial investigations in 2022, with the PLARF now accounting for roughly half of the PLA 3-star and 2-star officers officially removed during Xi Jinping's third term. During this timeframe, four PLARF commanders, plus one recently retired PLARF commander, and two PLARF PCs were either officially investigated or speculated as removed due to corruption. Overall, at least 17 PLARF flag officers are missing, under investigation, or dismissed since 2022, as listed in *Table 11*.

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Disappearance, Investigation, or Dismissal	Year
Yang Guang [杨光]	Gen.	Commander, PLARF	2026
Wang Houbin [王厚斌]	Gen.	Commander, PLARF	2025
Xu Xisheng [徐西盛]	Gen.	PC, PLARF	2025
Wang Zhibin [汪志斌]	Lt. Gen.	Secretary, PLARF DIC	2025
Zhang Fengzhong [张凤中]	Lt. Gen.	Director, PLARF PWD	2025
Wei Fenghe [魏凤和]	Gen.	(Ret.) CMC Member, MND, 2018–2023, former PLARF Commander, 2012-2017	2024
Wang Liyan [王立岩]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLARF	2025
Sun Jinming [孙金明]	Lt. Gen.	Chief of Staff, PLARF	2024
Li Yuchao [李玉超]	Gen.	Commander, PLARF	2023
Xu Zhongbo [徐忠波]	Gen.	PC, PLARF	2023
Liu Guangbin [刘光斌]	Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLARF	2023
Zhou Yaning [周亚宁]	Gen.	(Ret.) Commander, PLARF, 2017-2022	2023
Zhang Zhenzhong [张振中]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Chief of the CMC JSD, former Deputy Commander, PLARF	2023
Li Chuanguang [李传广]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLARF	2023
Wu Guohua [吴国华]	Lt. Gen.	(Ret.) Deputy Commander, PLARF, 2016-2022	2023
Lü Hong [吕宏]	Maj. Gen.	Director, PLARF ED	2023
Li Tongjian [李同建]	Maj. Gen.	Deputy Director, PLARF ED	2023

Table 11: PLARF Generals Expelled, Dismissed, Under Investigation, or Missing, 2023-2026¹²⁷

The emphasis on PLARF leadership may reflect the catalytic role of the PLARF investigations on Xi Jinping's fading confidence and increased scrutiny of high-ranking PLA officials during his third term. The 2023 dismissal of at least five PLARF senior officers, speculated in media reports to possibly coincide with allegations of Chinese missiles filled with water rather than fuel and malfunctioning missile silo lids, was among the first wave of recent PLA senior officer removals.¹²⁸ If the conjecture regarding the missiles is true, this could have reinforced Xi Jinping's long-standing claim that corruption is the "greatest threat to the CCP,"¹²⁹ subsequently sparking a loss of trust and increased focus on PLA flag officer corruption. The 2023 actions by Xi Jinping to replace the removed PLARF officers with PLAN and PLAAF officers suggest that the investigations at the time had already cast doubt on the remaining PLARF senior leadership. Alternatively, the increased scrutiny of PLARF

senior officers could also reflect the strategic importance of the PLARF land-based nuclear and conventional missile force.

Anti-corruption investigations of PLAN 2-star and 3-star officers increased noticeably in 2025, rising from one officially recognized investigation in 2024 to seven. The timing of this increase coincides with media reporting of a potential sinking of the first Zhou-class nuclear submarine while it was preparing for sea trials in mid-2024, and with conjecture regarding possible design flaws in the PLA's first domestically designed aircraft carrier.¹³⁰ If true, either of these events could have been a catalyst for Xi Jinping to lose confidence with PLAN leadership.

In contrast to the other services, the PLAAF appears to be the least affected service since 2022, with only one PLAAF general, Ding Laihang, officially charged with corruption and expelled from the Party in 2023. Ding Laihang, a former PLAAF commander and retired at the time of the investigation, was linked in media speculation to corruption regarding an airport construction project.¹³¹ Recent reporting suggests potential for future PLAAF leadership corruption investigations. The PLA advertised in December 2025 to request public reporting of any “irregular” PLAAF procurement activities. In addition to Ding Laihang, at least six current and former PLAAF generals are speculated to be under investigation, disappeared, or reportedly died since the start of 2025. The full list of official and speculated PLAAF generals investigated for corruption is listed in *Table 12*.¹³²

Name	Rank	Role Prior to Speculation	Year
Yu Zhongfu [于忠福]	Gen.	(Ret.) PC, PLAAF, 2015-2022	2026
Xu Xueqiang [许学强]	Gen.	Director, CMC EDD (PLAAF General)	2025
Chang Dingqiu ^{xiv} [常丁求]	Gen.	Commander, PLAAF	2025
Guo Puxiao [郭普校]	Gen.	PC, PLAAF	2025
Yu Qingjiang [俞庆江]	Lt. Gen.	Deputy Commander, PLAAF	2025
Ma Xiaotian [马晓天]	Gen.	(Ret.) Commander, PLAAF, 2012-2017	2025
Ding Laihang [丁来杭]	Gen.	(Ret.) Commander, PLAAF, 2017-2021	2023

Table 12: PLAAF generals officially investigated, removed from position, suspected of disappearing, or likely died, Jan. 2022-Feb. 2026¹³³

Political Implications

Some PLA watchers suggest that the anti-corruption campaign is a tool to consolidate control and ensure loyalty, citing examples such as Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, both retired CMC Vice Chairmen from Hu Jintao's tenure and placed under investigation by Xi Jinping, as well as the recent case of Zhang Youxia, also CMC Vice Chairman.¹³⁴ In the case of Zhang Youxia, reports circulated in late 2025 and early 2026 that Zhang Youxia, once a close political acquaintance of Xi Jinping, had politically undermined Xi Jinping before being placed under investigation in January 2026.¹³⁵ As recently as 2022, Xi Jinping appeared to favor Zhang Youxia, waiving customary age requirements in order for Zhang Youxia to remain in the CMC for a third term; Zhang was 72 in 2022.¹³⁶ However, China observers speculate that Zhang may have differed in opinion with Xi Jinping and, as one of the last few

^{xiv} Media speculation suggests that Chang Dingqiu died from a heart attack while in liuzhi [留置] detention for corruption investigation. (Reference: Li, “China's Youngest General Chang Dingqiu Reportedly Dies While in Detention.”)

PLA top officers remaining, Zhang had simultaneously gained influence within the PLA as other leaders were removed for corruption.¹³⁷

The official statement on the investigation of Zhang Youxia used stronger and more detailed verbiage than seen with earlier official corruption case announcements. It cited that Zhang caused “severe damage to the military’s political awareness” by “seriously trampling” on the chairman responsibility system and that he had “seriously undermined the image and authority” of the CMC leadership to cause “severe damage to the combat capability development” of the PLA.¹³⁸ This suggests that the removal of Zhang Youxia may have resulted from both political differences as well as corruption.¹³⁹

Statistics from 2012 to 2025 indicate a rough balance between investigations of those considered to have strong political ties with Xi Jinping and those who did not. The year 2023 marked the first instance of Xi Jinping removing flag officers that he had personally appointed, and as of 2025, of the 35 PLA 2-star and 3-star senior officers promoted by Xi Jinping since 2020, 32 were probably investigated and 29 were likely removed (accounting for both officially recognized corruption cases and speculated disappearances).¹⁴⁰ Over the full expanse of Xi Jinping’s tenure, the recurrence of investigations into those thought to be Xi Jinping’s allies and network suggests that the continued anti-corruption effort, at times, may have reflected Xi Jinping’s growing loss of confidence in PLA leaders.¹⁴¹

Political affiliation or prior close ties with Xi Jinping do not appear to prevent becoming a target of a corruption investigation, as in the examples of Wei Fenghe and Miao Hua. Wei Fenghe, Minister of National Defense and CMC member, was the first flag officer promoted by Xi Jinping after he assumed leadership of the CMC in 2012; Wei Fenghe was expelled from the Party in June 2024 for accepting bribes.¹⁴² Miao Hua, CMC member and Director of the PWD, was removed from his position and expelled from the Party in 2025 for serious violations of discipline, despite reportedly strong ties to Xi Jinping dating back to their time in Fujian from 1985 to 2002.¹⁴³ Some even considered Miao Hua to be a protégé of Xi Jinping.¹⁴⁴ The investigation of Miao Hua and his *guanxi* connections focused heavily on Xi Jinping’s loyalists from their time in Fujian Province, with fallout affecting multiple members of Xi Jinping’s network.¹⁴⁵

Implications for PLA Modernization

China observers suggest that the recent increase in PLA senior officer corruption investigations could indicate that the PLA is not on track to achieve its 2027 milestones. These goals, first identified during the 5th Plenum of the 19th Central Committee in October 2020 and later clarified by Xi Jinping in early 2021, call for accelerated military modernization—to include reform of the informatized and intelligentized warfare capabilities—as well as increased anti-corruption efforts.¹⁴⁶ The rising number of official and speculated PLA leadership removals for corruption gained momentum in 2023 and beyond. This coincided with the latter half of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), suggesting a potential correlation between the dismissals and possible deficits in the Five-Year Plan progression. However, it is difficult to determine if the aspect of the plan not being achieved is related to corruption, military modernization, or elements of both.

The 14th Five Year Plan called for acceleration of military modernization to implement “Xi Jinping Thought on Building a Strong Military [习近平强军思想]” and the “Military Strategic Directive for a New Era [新时代军事战略方针].” It also pledged to

uphold the “Eight Point Regulation” and the “three nots” of “not daring to be corrupt,” “not being able to be corrupt,” and “not wanting to be corrupt.”¹⁴⁷ The timing of the recent senior-level PLA corruption cases could reflect a commitment to a foundational policy of zero tolerance for corruption. If the rumors of capability shortfalls in PLA modernization programs are true, such as the speculated malfunctioning lids installed on missile silos and the sinking of the first Zhou-class submarine before sea trials, these may have increased urgency to enforce the anti-corruption policies.¹⁴⁸ After nearly a decade of reforms and policy updates, Xi Jinping may have lost patience waiting for progress.

The increased level of detail in public announcements for corruption cases could also indicate Xi Jinping’s waning patience as he observes the impact of corruption on the force. The increasingly public nature used to remove senior PLA officials for corruption is also raising the level of “warning” to the force about the costs of corruption. For example, the removal of Miao Hua and eight other PLA officers in October 2025 stated that it was for “serious violations of Party discipline” and that they were “suspected of serious duty-related crimes involving an extremely large amount of money, of extremely serious nature, and with extremely detrimental consequences.”¹⁴⁹ Earlier public announcements regarding corruption cases either stated that the individual was removed from their position without an explanation or simply cited “serious violations.”¹⁵⁰

Implications for the Future PLA

Regardless of the motivation, the corruption investigations will bring both short-term and long-term effects on PLA readiness. Fall-out from current and potential future corruption investigations could limit PLA readiness and slow PLA modernization progress in the near term, but may also bring about beneficial changes over time. PLA procurement efforts supporting near-term modernization goals could temporarily slow, as “fake combat capabilities” (interpreted by some observers to refer to corruption related to weapons procurement shortfalls) are identified.¹⁵¹ Yet there may also be short- and long-term gains for the PLA, as investigations likely illuminate PLA vulnerabilities for resolution.¹⁵² This could lead to further advancements and drive long-term improvements to the force.

The corruption investigations may also cause a temporary reduction in PLA readiness resulting from a lack of continuity in key leadership positions and turbulence from organizational uncertainty. Those remaining may feel compelled to provide the expected answers and to lead without questioning in an effort of self-preservation. This may mold leadership unwilling to suggest innovative solutions or hesitant to provide alternative viewpoints. The corruption investigations could also remove those from the ranks who do not fully align with Xi Jinping’s vision for the PLA. This may streamline future decision-making and will further align the force toward the modernization goals. Additionally, the investigations could build a climate of zero tolerance for corruption. While past anti-corruption efforts have yielded minimal results, at best, removing senior-level officials could be enough to spark radical change throughout the ranks. This message of anti-corruption enforcement will reverberate throughout the force, which could ultimately bring about the change that Xi Jinping is calling for—eradicating corruption and its effects on readiness in the PLA.

The loss of top-tier PLA generals could stunt growth within the force, which has benefited from their leadership experience. The recent tier of PLA officials removed saw with

it the departure of the last flag officers with true combat experience, such as Zhang Youxia. These generals witnessed the Sino-Vietnamese conflict in 1979 and personally saw the heavy losses attributed to outdated doctrine, low morale, lagging readiness, and unfit leadership.¹⁵³ The lessons learned from this combat experience are now only textbook. That said, the mitigating factors could reduce the impact of this on PLA readiness. As is often the case with large, bureaucratic organizations, many of the PLA positions vacated probably have interim or acting leaders temporarily filling the roles. Additionally, bringing forward a relatively younger generation of leaders and retaining those who align with Xi Jinping's vision for the PLA could propel PLA readiness in the future.

The generation of PLA flag officers removed during the past three years were witness to dramatic, sweeping changes in PLA operational doctrine. The force grew from a ground-centric, technologically limited military of the late 1970s to the modern, joint force of present day. The PLA reorganization of 2015 and continued refinement of its military theory, doctrine, and operational concepts significantly reshaped the PLA and what it values in its officer corps.¹⁵⁴ Bringing forward a relatively younger generation of PLA senior officers, with arguably more joint and technology driven experiences at lower levels, may hasten alignment of the PLA to its modernization goals.

Conclusion

Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign, now in its fourteenth year, appears to be strengthening resolve against PLA senior officers, with few indications of slowing down. While corruption investigations during the past few years significantly altered the ranks of PLA senior leadership and may bring about some short-term negative side effects, the long-term benefits of removing officers with misaligned priorities could prove beneficial for the PLA. Additionally, the investigations could identify shortfalls and illuminate opportunities to improve force readiness, ultimately creating a more capable PLA. As such, both PLA readiness and its modernization programs could improve in the long-term due to the anti-corruption campaign.

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Term
AMS	Academy of Military Sciences
CCDI	Central Commission for Discipline Inspection
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCPCC	CCP Central Committee
CMC	Central Military Commission
CTC	Central Theater Command
DIC	Discipline Inspection Commission
ED	Equipment Department
EDD	Equipment Development Department
ETC	Eastern Theater Command
ETCN	Eastern Theater Command Navy
GLD	General Logistics Department
GPD	General Political Department
JOCC	Joint Operations Command Center
JSD	Joint Staff Department
LSD	Logistic Support Department
MND	Ministry of National Defense
N/A	Not applicable
NPC	National People's Congress
NTC	Northern Theater Command
NTCN	Northern Theater Command Navy
PAP	People's Armed Police
PC	Political Commissar
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAA	PLA Army
PLAAF	PLA Air Force
PLAN	PLA Navy
PLARF	PLA Rocket Force
PLASSF	PLA Strategic Support Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
PWD	Political Works Department
SCIO	State Council Information Office
SCNPC	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress
SOE	State-owned Enterprise
STC	Southern Theater Command
STCN	Southern Theater Command Navy
U.S. DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
WTC	Western Theater Command

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