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'IMPLICATIONS OF THE DISMISSAL OF NINE SENIOR PLA GENERALS'

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As the situation begins to settle and with the lapse of a little time, more information on the circumstances surrounding the dismissal on October 17, of nine senior Generals of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has filtered out of China. These suggest that factors like loyalty, political reliability and competence -- or willingness "to fight and win a war" -- were major considerations apart from corruption. To an extent this explains Chinese President Xi Jinping's decision to dismiss the Generals, who included his handpicked choices for the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and the Commander of the important and active Eastern Theatre Command. It also explains Xi Jinping's decision to drastically reduce the PLA's representation in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s Central Committee (CC) to less than half its original strength in the CCP CC at the 20th Party Congress in 2022.

2. Preparations appear to have been made for a quick transition as evident from the appointment of replacements for the dismissed Generals. Available information reveals that:

He Weidong, former Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), was replaced by General Zhang Shengmin, Secretary of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission; Miao Hua, former Member of the CMC and former Director of the Political Work Department of the CMC, was not replaced; He Hongjun, former Executive Deputy Director of the Political Work Department of the CMC, was replaced by Lieutenant General Wang Chengnan of the PLA Air Force, Lieutenant General Zhang Yutang of the Rocket Force, and Vice Admiral Xiong Zhaoyuan of the Navy; Wang Xiubin, former Executive Deputy Director of the Joint Operations Command Centre of the CMC, was replaced by Lieutenant Generals Dong Li and Zheng Shoudong; Lin Xiangyang, former Commander of the Eastern Theatre Command, was replaced by Lieutenant General Yang Zhibin of the PLA Air Force; Qin Shutong, former Political Commissar of the PLA Army, was replaced by General Chen Hui of the PLA Air Force; Yuan Huazhi, former Political Commissar of the Navy, was replaced by Major General Leng Shaojie of the Army, who was promoted to Acting Vice Admiral of the Navy; Wang Houbin, Commander of the Rocket Force, was not replaced; Wang Chunling, former Commander of the People's Armed Police Force, was replaced by Lieutenant General Cao Junzhang of the People's Armed Police Force.

3. Other officers appointed in acting or regular capacity are: Vice Admiral Cui Yuzhong (Acting Deputy Commander) as Acting Commander of the PLA Navy; Lieutenant General Chen Chi (promoted from Deputy Director) as Director of the Logistics Support Department; Lieutenant General Zhu Chuansheng (appointed against General Xu Qiling's vacancy) as Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff Department; Lieutenant General Zhang Like (promoted from Deputy Director) as Director of the National Defence Mobilization Department; and Lieutenant General Liu Di (promoted from Deputy Director) as Director of the Training and Management Department of the Central Military Commission.

4. Worth noting in the appointment of replacements is that:

- i) He Hongjun, former Executive Deputy Director of the Political Work Department of the CMC, was replaced by three officers of equal rank, namely Lieutenant General Wang Chengnan of the PLA Air Force, Lieutenant General Zhang Yutang of the Rocket Force, and Vice Admiral Xiong Zhaoyuan of the Navy. It is probable that depending on their

performance one will be promoted as Director of the Political Work Department of the CMC and one retained as Executive Deputy Director of the Political Work Department of the CMC or replaced. The unusual arrangement indicates that the CMC Political Work Department, which is responsible for ensuring the discipline, loyalty and political reliability of PLA officers and personnel, has been strengthened. Additionally, the appointment of three officers one each from the PLA Air Force, PLA Rocket Force, and PLA Navy suggests that the Department will be closely monitored. General He Hongjun, incidentally, is reported to have committed suicide before he was convicted on charges of corruption.

- ii) Wang Xiubin, the former Executive Deputy Director of the Joint Operations Command Centre of the CMC has been replaced by Lieutenant Generals Dong Li and Zheng Shoudong indicating that this office has been strengthened, reflecting the increasing emphasis on joint operations.
- iii) PLA Air Force officers have replaced officers from other services in at least three cases. The replacement of General Lin Xiangyang, former Commander of the Eastern Theatre Command, by Lieutenant General Yang Zhibin of the PLA Air Force could suggest an enhanced role for the PLAAF in operations against Taiwan.

5. Soon after the CCP CC's Fourth Plenum ended on October 23, the first Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) General Zhang Youxia published an important and lengthy 3361-word, 3-part signed article in the CCP's official newspaper People's Daily on November 12, 2025. It included 24 references to Xi Jinping. Emphasising the importance of the Fifteenth Five Year Plan's 'suggestions' for modernisation and achieving the PLA's centenary goals, Zhang Youxia highlighted the importance of political education and need for the PLA's "absolute loyalty" to the CCP CC with Xi Jinping at the core. He stressed "We must thoroughly implement Xi Jinping's thought on strengthening the military, highlight the theme of promoting high-quality development, formulate and implement the 15th Five-Year Plan for military development effectively, unwaveringly follow the path of building a strong military with Chinese characteristics, and improve our strategic capabilities to safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests". The article implied that the dismissed officers had neglected to enforce "the Party's absolute leadership over the People's Army" and "effectively carry out the work of building and controlling the troops ideologically and politically". He appeared to hint that He Weidong and Miao Hua were not entirely loyal to Xi Jinping and were creating their own factions. Zhang Youxia emphasised "We must strengthen political guidance to forge loyalty ... resolutely prevent being a "two-faced person" or engaging in false loyalty, and truly root the maintenance of the core leadership and obedience to the Party's command in the minds of officers and soldiers and implement it in all practices of our army's modernization". The references to being a "two-faced person" or "engaging in false loyalty" are significant.

6. Zhang Youxia called for accelerating "the integrated development of mechanization, informatization, and intelligentization" to achieve a significant leap forward in national defense capabilities. He revealed that modernization of national defence and the armed forces is a phased process and that "President Xi Jinping has strategically planned a new "three-step" strategic arrangement, connecting 2027, 2035, and the middle of this century". He said Xi Jinping's roadmap and objectives "connect the near, medium, and long term, establishing the strategic framework for our military to become a world-class force". He underscored the importance of tackling "the first step decisively, ensuring its timely completion" to build a strong military by overcoming obstacles, addressing weaknesses and comprehensively advancing strategic capability building. He said to take the second step and strive for decisive progress, "we must consolidate the first step, shape a new structure and form of military forces, accumulate new momentum and advantages for high-quality development, and promote a significant enhancement of joint combat capabilities and all-domain combat capabilities based on network information systems, so as to lay a solid foundation for the basic

realization of national defence and military modernization". The reference to 'shaping a new structure and form of military forces' could suggest further reorganisation of the PLA. Significant also are the mention of joint combat capabilities and all-domain combat capabilities based on "intelligentisation"

7. Stressing the importance of technology for the PLA, Zhang Youxia emphasised that "A new round of technological and military revolution is entering a period of accelerated development". Zhang Youxia said "to adapt to it and change", the PLA must encourage innovation, accelerate the transformation of combat capability generation models, and grasp the initiative in military competition and war. He explained "We must strengthen the principle of building for combat, deeply study the winning mechanisms of informationised and intelligent warfare" and "fully integrate combat capability standards into planning and construction". We must "adhere to independent control, focus on high-level technological self-reliance, vigorously promote independent innovation and original innovation, and solve the "bottleneck" problem of key technologies".

8. Discussing the 'Key Tasks for Coordinating and Advancing the Modernization of National Defense and the Armed Forces during the 15th Five-Year Plan Period', Zhang Youxia stressed the development of combat capabilities, including strategic deterrence forces, to build a strong military. He added that China will innovate and modernise military theory and formulate a modern military theory system with Chinese characteristics. "We will continuously optimize the military force system, strengthen strategic deterrence forces, promote the large-scale, combat-oriented, and systematic development of new-domain and new-quality combat forces, strengthen the upgrading and transformation of traditional combat forces, and use the "superiority" of the system structure to generate "strength" in combat capability'. He gave equal importance to Modernization of Military Governance including strengthening Party Committee leadership and further enhancing Civil-Military Fusion.

9. Another apparent fallout of the dismissal of He Weidong, Miao Hua and the other Generals, are the numerous commentaries and articles in China's official media on loyalty, "self-revolution" and against corruption. Many articles named He Weidong and Miao Hua. Since November 17, all PLA Theatre Commands have been noticed publicising their "absolute obedience to the CCP with Xi Jinping as the core" and emphasising their combat readiness. Falling in line with the apparently revived emphasis on combat readiness of troops and 'preparing to fight and win a war', the PLA Eastern, Western, Central, Southern, and Northern Theatre Commands, as well as the Navy and Air Force, have resorted to using their official social media accounts. They sought to highlight their high fighting morale and combat readiness by using phrases such as "ready to fight and win a war", "always combat-ready", "summoned, we fight" etc. For example, on November 20, the Eastern Theatre Command published high-definition footage of the Type-05 amphibious assault vehicle, describing it as "supercar of the sea", "tool for seizing the beach" and "iron cavalry of sea and land". All are associated with amphibious landing operations.

10. The Western Theatre Air Force also stated it had expanded realistic training with long-range manoeuvres, air-combat drills, aerial refuelling, high-altitude deployments, and large joint exercises. In another article the PLA Western Theatre Command -- whose Commander Wang Haijiang was not seen at the Fourth Party Plenum this October -- reported it is undergoing strict ideological tightening and intensified war readiness. It said internal discipline, political loyalty, and combat readiness are inseparable adding that corrupt, complacent, or politically unreliable officers weaken the army, while disciplined and loyal officers strengthen it. The article described how the PLA Western Theatre Command Air Force carried out a major political rectification campaign aimed at defeating the "enemy in the heart" and used the old saying "It is easy to defeat bandits in the mountains, but hard to defeat the bandit in one's heart", thus stressing that internal ideological problems are more dangerous than external enemies. The Western Theatre Command leadership argued that many issues in the military come from the "root of ideology" and must be addressed through "deep self-revolution" and "soul-level reflection". A central theme was the demand for "absolute loyalty to the Party and to Xi Jinping".

The article also warned against fake loyalty and cited corruption cases with He Weidong and Miao Hua as examples. It categorised different types of false loyalty—such as “verbal loyalty”, “distorted loyalty”, “packaged loyalty”, and “wavering loyalty” and argued that these were deceptive and harmful.

12. The drastic reduction in PLA representation in the CCP Central Committee confirms that Xi Jinping has been angered by the involvement of He Weidong and Miao Hua -- his personal associates -- and is probably once again vetting all senior officers in an attempt to identify and eliminate those personally loyal and close to He Weidong and Miao Hua. The willingness and ability of officers to launch operations against Taiwan will be a criteria for appointment. The Fourth Plenum decisions and CMC Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia’s detailed article additionally reveal that China is strengthening its nuclear capability and enlarging the number of nuclear warheads. It is accelerating acquisition of ‘new-domain’ and ‘new quality combat’ forces and integrating ‘Informationised’ and ‘Intelligent’ warfare with combat forces. Zhang Youxia’s article reiterates the importance of 2027 for modernising the PLA and making it a world class force. 2027 is also when Xi Jinping will convene the 21st Party Congress and, by current indications, will embark on a fourth term at China’s helm. The years immediately following that could herald escalated tension with Taiwan as Xi Jinping tries to realise his ambition and effect Taiwan’s reunification with the Mainland. China would probably also use its strengthened and modernised armed forces to “recover” claimed territories thereby posing a threat to its neighbours, including India.

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