

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

Xi Jinping's Crackdown on Corruption in the PLA

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Summary

The relatively large number of senior PLA officials who have been suspended or expelled since 2012 during President Xi Jinping's tenure, shows the existence of a deeply rooted, structural problem of corruption within the Chinese military. Going forward, if Xi Jinping's position weakens for any reason, there could be a further spurt in corruption related to the PLA military.

At the 16th Meeting of the 14th National People’s Congress (NPC) Standing Committee on 27 June 2025, People’s Liberation Army (PLA) General Miao Hua (苗华) was removed from the Central Military Commission (CMC). In November 2024, China’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) had stated that Miao Hua was ‘suspected of serious violations of discipline ...’¹ Miao Hua was one of the closest confidants of Xi Jinping. He was Director of the CMC Political Work Department from 2017 to 2024, which oversees Chinese military adherence to the Communist Party of China’s (CPC) political ideology and makes major appointments in the PLA.² Along with Miao Hua, Li Hanjun (李汉军), Chief of Staff of the PLA Navy, was also removed from the 14th NPC on the same day.³

In 2024, China expelled two former defence ministers, Li Shangfu (李尚福) and his predecessor Wei Fenghe (魏凤和), from the CPC as well as from their respective government posts.⁴ The relatively large number of senior PLA officials who have been suspended or expelled since 2012 in President Xi Jinping’s tenure indicates the existence of a deeply-rooted, structural problem of corruption within the Chinese military.

Xi’s Anti-Corruption Campaigns

Strong action against corrupt military leaders have been a prominent feature of Xi Jinping’s regime. In July 2024, at the 3rd Plenary Session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC, Xi Jinping stated that while China has achieved an overwhelming victory after 10 years of anti-corruption struggle, the situation remained grim and complicated.⁵ At the meeting of senior commanders in Yan’an in June 2024, Xi Jinping stated that “the barrels of guns must always be in the hands of those who are loyal and dependable to the party” and asserted that “there is no place for any corrupt elements in the military”.⁶

¹“[Miao Hua, Member of the Central Military Commission and Director of the Political Work Department of the Military Commission, Was Suspended for Investigation](#) (中央军委委员、军委政治工作部上将主任苗华被停职检查)”, PRC Ministry of Defense, 28 November 2024.

² Chu Bailiang (储百亮), “[The PLA’s Top Leadership is Shaken Again: Miao Hua, a Member of the Central Military Commission, Has Been Suspended](#) (解放军高层再次震荡：中央军委委员苗华被停职)”, *The New York Times*, 29 November 2024.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Laurie Chen and Jessie Pang, “[China’s Communist Party Removes ex-foreign, Defence Ministers from Top Body](#)”, *Reuters*, 18 July 2024.

⁵ “[Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection: Deepen the Party’s Self-revolution and Resolutely Win the Tough and Protracted Battle Against Corruption](#) (习近平在二十届中央纪委三次全会上发表重要讲话：深入推进党的自我革命坚决打赢反腐败斗争攻坚战持久战)”, *Xinhua News Agency*, 8 January 2024.

⁶ Andrew Wedeman, “[The Red Glare of Xi’s Second PLA Purge](#)”, *East Asia Forum*, 3 August 2024.

Xi Jinping’s predecessor, Hu Jintao, also made concerted efforts to address rising corruption in the military. Hu Jintao promulgated regulations to prevent corruption in the military, such as the ‘2008-2012 Work Plan for Establishing and Improving the Military System for Punishing and Preventing Corruption’ issued by the CMC in September 2008, among others. However, the central leadership under Hu Jintao failed to effectively prevent corruption in the military.

With Xi Jinping in power since 2012, more than 100 PLA officers have been investigated and punished.⁷ Six CMC Members have been dismissed on charges of corruption or violations of discipline. These include the following:

- Xu Caihou (徐才厚, 1943), former member of the Politburo of the CPC and Vice Chairman of the CMC, was suspended on 15 March 2014.
- Guo Boxiong (郭伯雄, 1942), former member of the CPC Politburo and vice chairman of the CMC, was sentenced to life imprisonment in July 2016.
- Zhang Yang (张阳, 1951), former member of the CMC and director of the CMC Political Work Department, was posthumously expelled from the Party in 2018 (He committed suicide in November 2017 at his home).
- Fang Fenghui (房峰辉, 1951), former member of the CMC and chief of staff of the CMC Joint Staff Department, expelled in October 2018.
- Li Shangfu (李尚福, 1958), former member of the CMC, State Councilor and Defense Minister, expelled from the Party and NPC in September 2024.
- Wei Fenghe (魏凤和, 1954), former member of the CMC, State Councilor and defense minister, expelled from the Party and the NPC in June 2024.
- Miao Hua (苗华, 1955), CMC Member and Director of the CMC Political Work Department, expelled from the Party and the NPC in June 2025.

Xi Jinping has initiated two rounds of anti-corruption campaigns, the first in November 2012 after the 18th CPC National Congress⁸, and the second in early 2023 after the 20th CPC National Congress. The first round of the anti-corruption campaign

⁷ Teddy Ng, “[Former Top Chinese General Fang Fenghui Jailed for Life for Corruption](#)”, *South China Morning Post*, 20 February 2019.

⁸ “[Anti-corruption after the 18th CPC National Congress](#) (中共十八大后的反腐败)”, Zh. Wikipedia, 2025.

involved senior CMC leaders from 2002 to 2012, who were from Xi Jinping’s rival faction.⁹ However, in the second round, some of the closest confidantes and appointees of Xi Jinping were investigated and prosecuted.¹⁰

In the first round of anti-corruption drive in the PLA, a key episode was the bribery case of Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, the two former Vice Chairman of the CMC, in 2012. Subsequently, their close associates, such as Zhang Yang and Fang Fenghui, both former CMC Members, were investigated in the same bribery case and prosecuted.¹¹ The case involved four of the seven CMC Members who had served before Xi Jinping’s appointment as General Secretary of the CPC in late 2012. After two years of investigation, in January 2015, China listed 16 senior PLA officers under investigation on charges of corruption.¹² Among them, one was a PLA General, three were PLA Lt. Generals, eleven were PLA Major Generals, and one was a PLA Colonel.

In July 2015, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee decided to expel General Guo Boxiong, Vice Chairman of the CMC (2002–2012), from the Party on charges of influencing promotions and accepting bribes directly or through his family.¹³ In July 2016, Guo Boxiong was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of bribery.¹⁴ Besides Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, the other senior PLA leaders involved in the scam were Lt Gen Yang Jinshan (杨金山), former Deputy Commander of the Chengdu Military Region (2013–2014), Lt Gen Fan Changmi (范长秘), former Deputy Political Commissar of the Lanzhou Military Region (July 2014–December 2014) and Lt Gen Yu Daqing (于大清), Deputy Political Commissar of the Second Artillery Corps.¹⁵

The second round of anti-corruption campaign began shortly after Xi Jinping was elected state president for the third term at the 14th NPC in March 2023. The scams

⁹ Jeremy Bender, [“Here’s Why It Was So Shocking That Chinese General Xu Caihou Was Busted For Corruption”](#), *Business Insider*, 23 January 2015.

¹⁰ Jonathan A. Czin, [“Thoughts on the Political Demise of Miao Hua-What Was Once Improbable in Chinese Politics Has Now Become Yet Another Symptom of a New Normal”](#), *Brookings*, 18 February 2025.

¹¹ [“Fang Fenghui: China’s ex-top General Jailed For Life”](#), *BBC*, 20 February 2019.

¹² [“Foreign Media Hotly Discusses the Investigation of 16 Senior Officers of the People’s Liberation Army. Military Discipline Committee Cadres Reveal the Hidden Rules \(外媒热议解放军16名高级军官被查军队纪委干部揭秘潜规则\)”](#), *The Global Times*, 16 January 2015.

¹³ [“The CPC Central Committee Decided to Expel GuoBoxiong from the Party and Transfer His Suspected Criminal Issues and Clues to the Judicial Authorities \(中共中央决定开除郭伯雄党籍将其涉嫌犯罪问题及线索移送司法机关\)”](#), Central Government Portal, *Xinhua News Agency*, 30 July 2015.

¹⁴ Wang Zhengqi and Zhang Yuke, [“GuoBoxiong was Sentenced to Life Imprisonment in the First Instance \(郭伯雄一审被判处无期徒刑\)”](#), *Xinhua News Agency*, 25 July 2016.

¹⁵ Xu Chenjing, [“Tiger Hunting’ in the Military-Xu Caihou, Yang Jinshan, Fan Changmi, Yu Daqing and 16 Other High-ranking Military Officials Were Sacked \(军中“打虎”- 徐才厚杨金山范长秘于大清等16名军以上高官落马\)”](#), *Global People*, Issue 3, 2015.

largely involved PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) weapons procurement dating back to 2017.¹⁶ By the end of 2023, the services of 15 high-ranking PLA officers and defence industry executives were terminated, including nine senior PLA officers affiliated with the PLARF and CMC Equipment Development Department (EDD).¹⁷

The campaign began with the announcement of illegal military equipment procurement bidding since October 2017 by CMC EDD on 26 July 2023.¹⁸ Following the announcement, all senior-most leaders of the PLARF, including Commander Li Yuchao (李玉超), Political Commissar Xu Zhongbo (徐忠波), Deputy Commander Liu Guangbin (刘光斌) and Deputy Commander Zhang Zhenzhong (张振中), were suspended.¹⁹

In December 2023, at a meeting of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), membership of three officials was revoked. These officials were from the state-owned corporations, namely Liu Shiquan (刘石泉), Chairman of China North Industries Group Corporation, Wu Yansheng (吴燕生), Chairman of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation and Wang Changqing (王长青), Deputy General Manager of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation.²⁰ These three super-large central enterprises are the main institutions in China to develop and produce missiles.

In the same month, nine senior PLA officers Zhang Zhenzhong (张振中, 1961), Zhang Yulin (张育林, 1958), Rao Wenmin (饶文敏), Ju Xinchun (鞠新春, 1965), Ding Laihang (丁来杭, 1957), Lv Hong (吕宏), Li Yuchao (李玉超, 1962), Li Chuanguang (李传广, 1961), and Zhou Yaning (周亚宁, 1957) were removed from their posts as the PLA Deputies to the NPC.²¹ These nine officials are from the CMC EDD, PLA Navy, PLA Air Force and the PLARF. Six months later, in July 2024, investigation reports on two former Defense Ministers, Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu, were submitted at the

¹⁶ [“U.S. Department of Defense Report: Corruption May Disrupt China’s PLA Military Modernization Goals](#) (美国国防部报告：腐败问题或扰乱中国解放军军事现代化目标)”, *Zaobao*, 19 December 2024.

¹⁷ [“Chinese Anti-corruption Investigators Target Top PLA Rocket Force Generals, Sources Say”](#), *South China Morning Post*, 28 July 2023.

¹⁸ [“China’s Military Collects Clues of Illegal Military Equipment Bidding Dating Back to 2017](#) (中国军方征集违规军事装备招标行为线索追溯至2017年)”, *Zaobao*, 29 July 2023.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ [“Li Shangfu is Suspected to be Involved in the Corruption Case of the Rocket Force. Three Chinese Military Giants Withdraw Their CPPCC Membership](#) (疑卷火箭军腐败案牵涉李尚福中国3军工巨头撤政协资格)”, *Nanyang*, 28 December 2023.

²¹ Miao Zonghan (缪宗翰), [“Nine Chinese Military NPC Deputies Removed From Their Posts Analysis: The Corruption Case in the Rocket Force and Equipment System Has Spread Widely](#) (九名中国军方人大代表被免职 分析：火箭军和装备系统腐败窝案波及广泛)”, *Zaobao*, 30 December 2023.

plenary meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee by the CMC.²² Subsequently, the Defense Minister Li Shangfu and his predecessor Wei Fenghe were suspended in October 2024.²³ PLARF weapon procurement bidding of 2017 took place when Li Shangfu was Director of the CMC EDD (2017–2023), and Wei Fenghe was Commander of the PLARF (2015–2017).

Table 1. PLA Officers Prosecuted in Second Anti-Corruption Drive

Name	Post	Date of removal
Lt Gen Zhang Zhenzhong (张振中)	Former Chief of Staff of the CMC Joint Chief of Staff	7 July 2023
Major Gen Lv Hong (吕宏)	Former Director of the PLARF Equipment Department	26 September 2023
Gen Li Yuchao (李玉超)	Former Commander of the PLARF	26 September 2023
Gen Zhou Yaning (周亚宁)	Former Commander of the PLARF	26 September 2023
Lt Gen JuXinchun (鞠新春)	Former Deputy Commander of the PLA Southern Theatre Command (STC) & Commander of the PLA STC Navy	27 November 2023
Lt Gen Zhang Yuling (张育林)	Former Deputy Director of the CMC EDD	28 November 2023
Lt Gen Yao Wenmin (饶文敏)	Former Deputy Director of the CMC EDD	28 November 2023
Gen Ding Laihang (丁来杭)	Former Commander of the PLA Air Force	4 December 2023

²² Zhang Jing (張競), “[Li Shangfu and Wei Fenghe Were Punished, and the Rocket Force Corruption Case Was Closed \(懲處李尚福魏鳳和火箭軍貪腐案收網\)](#)”, Institute of Chinese Communist Studies, Taiwan, 28 June 2024.

²³ “[Stop Fabricating False Narratives: China Slams Pentagon Report on PLA](#)”, *Business Standard*, Beijing, 22 December 2024.

Lt Gen Li Chuanguang (李传广)	Former Commander of the PLARF	5 December 2023
Lt Gen Li Zhizhong (李志忠)	Former Deputy Commander of the PLA Central Theatre Command	27 February 2024
Gen Li Shangfu (李尚福)	Former Defense Minister of China & CMC Member	11 July 2024
Gen Wei Fenghe (魏凤和)	Former Defense Minister of China & CMC Member	27 June 2024

Source: Prepared by the author from media reports

Another senior PLA officer investigated following Miao Hua’s suspension was Lt Gen You Haitao. You Haitao is the son of You Taizhong (尤太忠, 1918-1998), a founding General of the PLA.²⁴ You Haitao’s last appointment was as Deputy Commander of the PLA Army in January 2016, and he retired from military services in 2023. He was appointed a member of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee of the 14th NPC. His dismissal from the NPC was announced in December 2024, a month after the suspension of the then Defense Minister Li Shangfu. Likely, You Haitao was involved in the PLARF weapon procurement scam of 2017.²⁵

It is worth noting that the 2023 Rocket Force weapon procurement scam dates back to 2017, which is a year after the completion of the first round of the anti-corruption campaign in 2016. It reflects that corruption was a structural issue, and that the close confidantes or appointees of Xi Jinping probably presumed they had immunity. It is interesting to note that Xi Jinping did not disclose the 2017 Rocket Force weapon procurement scam in his second term as state-president from March 2018 to March 2023. He did so after he got his third term as state-president (2023–2028). It can be inferred that Xi Jinping took time to consolidate power in the Party and the PLA in the second term by not purging his confidantes or loyalists involved in the scam.

²⁴ [“You Taizhong - Founding Major General of the People's Republic of China, Former Member of the Central Advisory Committee”](#) (尤太忠-中华人民共和国开国少将，中央顾问委员会原委员)”, *Baidu*, 2025.

²⁵ [“Han Yonghong: China’s PLA Anti-corruption Campaign Expands Again”](#) (韩咏红：中国解放军反腐再扩大)”, *Zaobao*, 27 December 2024.

The Case of Miao Hua

Miao Hua was considered one of Xi Jinping’s confidants. The earliest known contacts between the two leaders date back to 1985, when Miao Hua was appointed a subordinate officer to Xi Jinping in Fujian Province, where the two worked together till 2002. In the Chinese military, Miao Hua was a key figure who assisted Xi Jinping in consolidating his power.²⁶ For instance, at the ‘New Gutian Conference’ held in Gutian Town, Fujian Province, on 30 October 2014, Miao Hua praised Xi Jinping and criticised Xu Caihou (徐才厚), then Vice Chairman of the CMC, who belonged to Xi Jinping’s rival faction.²⁷ Xi Jinping made Miao Hua the youngest serving PLA General in 2015, and in 2017, at the 19th National Congress of the CPC, he was appointed Member of the CMC and Director of the CMC Political Work Department.²⁸

Following the suspension of Miao Hua, in the very next month, in December 2024, the Standing Committee of the NPC announced the termination of eight representatives to the NPC. Among them, two senior PLA officers, Lt Gen You Haitao (尤海涛, 1958), former Deputy Commander of the PLA Army, and Lt Gen Li Pengcheng (李鹏程, 1963), former Commander of the PLA Southern Theatre Command Navy, were also dismissed. It is to be noted that Li Pengcheng has worked under Miao Hua in the PLA Navy from 2014 to 2017.²⁹

Soon after the suspension of General Miao Hua, reports also circulated that the current Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun (董军) was recommended by Miao Hua to Xi Jinping for the post of Defense Minister and that his fall was also imminent. Dong Jun was Miao Hua’s subordinate in the PLA Navy from 2014 to 2017. While the Chinese Foreign Ministry denied the rumour, the fact is that Dong Jun has enjoyed successive promotions during Miao Hua’s tenure as Director of the CMC Political Work Department. For instance, after merely five months as Deputy Commander of the PLA Navy, he succeeded outgoing PLA Navy Commander Shen Jinlong (沈金龙) in September 2021. His appointment bypassed senior officers such as Zhang Wendan (张文旦), First Deputy Commander of the PLA Navy, designated

²⁶ Nectar Gan, [“Xi Brought Down Powerful Rivals in the Military. Now He’s Going After His Own Men”](#), *CNN*, 15 December 2024.

²⁷ [“Miao Hua’s ‘Gang’ Collapsed, Who Moved Xi Jinping’s Cheese?”](#) (苗华“帮派”覆灭，谁动了习近平的乳酪), *Creaders.net*, 8 December 2024.

²⁸ Dang Yuanyue, [“China is Investigating Senior Military Official Miao Hua. Will It Affect the PLA?”](#), *South China Morning Post*, Beijing, 21 December 2024.

²⁹ [“Li Pengcheng - Former Deputy Commander of the Southern Theater Command and Commander of the Southern Theater Command Navy”](#) (李鹏程-南部战区原副司令员兼南部战区海军司令员), *Baidu*, 2025.

since 2019.³⁰ As per usual practice, the First Deputy Commander succeeds the outgoing Commander.

According to Yao Cheng (姚成), a former Lt Colonel of the PLA Navy, during the investigation of Miao Hua’s case, two former political commissars of the PLA Navy, Qin Shengxiang (秦生祥, 1957) and Yuan Huazhi (袁华智, 1961), and the incumbent Defense Minister Dong Jun made statements unfavourable to Miao Hua before the investigators.³¹ It is worth mentioning that Yuan Huazhi was subordinate to Miao Hua in the PLA Navy from 2014 to 2017. With Miao Hua as Director of the CMC Political Work Department, Yuan Huazhi had three successive promotions in less than three years from December 2018 to January 2022,³² and two successive promotions in PLA rank within two years. He was made PLA Lt General in December 2019 and was successively promoted to PLA General in January 2022.

Usually, it takes at least three years to become a PLA General from a Lieutenant General. The career profiles of Dong Jun, Yuan Haizhi and Qin Shengxiang showed that they enjoyed successive promotions and in relatively shorter intervals during Miao Hua’s tenure as Director of the CMC Political Work Department, which oversees the major PLA appointments. In the Chinese military system, favouring promotion is considered a ‘violation of discipline’.

Conclusion

Xi Jinping has taken a series of steps to fight corruption in the military. ‘2013-2017 Work Plan for Establishing and Improving the System for Punishing and Preventing Corruption’ was issued in December 2013.³³ Under him, the leadership identified corruption as the biggest threat faced by the Party and the military.³⁴ The 13th NPC passed the ‘Supervision Law’, a national anti-corruption legislation, to build a centralised supervision system to prevent corruption. The Party Central Committee

³⁰ [“Deputy Commander Zhang Wendan of the Navy Visited the People's Hospital of Basu County, Tibet, to Inspect and Supervise the Center's Counterpart Medical Assistance](#) (海军张文旦副司令员亲临西藏八宿县人民医院检查督导中心对口医疗帮扶情况)”, Navy Special Medical Center, May 2020.

³¹ [“Analysis: Miao Hua's Fall May Be Due to the Struggle Between Xi and Zhang, and Dong Jun Will Have Trouble Staying Safe When He Appears in Public](#) (分析: 苗华落马恐因习张斗董军露面难平安)”, *The Epoch Times*, 7 December 2024.

³² Song Jiangyun (宋江云), [“Yuan Huazhi, the First Political Commissar of the Marine Corps, Has Been Appointed as the Political Commissar of the Eastern Theater Air Force](#) (海军陆战队首任政委袁华智已任东部战区空军政委)”, *The Paper*, 15 January 2019.

³³ Niu Chenfei, [“Central Military Commission Issues Work Plan to Promote Military Corruption Prevention](#) (中央军委印发工作规划推进军队惩防腐败)”, *PLA Daily*, 7 May 2014.

³⁴ Wang Xing and Deng Dongrui, [“Interpretation of the Tasks of Military Discipline Inspection and Supervision in 2025](#) (2025年军队纪检监察工作任务解读)”, *PLA Daily*, 21 January 2025.

formulated the ‘Central Anti-Corruption Coordination Group Work Plan (2023-2027)’ that integrates the discipline inspection and supervision agencies at all levels to actively respond to new challenges in fighting corruption.³⁵

Xi Jinping has also not spared many of his appointees from prosecution due to corruption charges. The central leadership has consequently also faced the challenges of filling the vacant posts. For instance, the position of defence minister remained vacant for nearly two months (from 25 October to 28 December 2023). The appointment of Dong Jun on 29 December 2023 was abrupt without giving him the additional posts of Security Council Member and CMC Member, posts which are usually held by the defence minister. Currently, the CMC is a five-member team and two seats have been vacant since 2024. Going forward, if Xi Jinping’s position weakens for any reason, there could be a further spurt in corruption related to the PLA military.

³⁵ [“An Important Milestone in the Legalization of Anti-corruption Work - A Record of the Legislation of the ‘Supervision Law of the People’s Republic of China’](#) (反腐败工作法治化的重要里程碑——《中华人民共和国监察法》立法纪实), *Xinhua News Agency*, 21 March 2018.

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