

Communist Party Controls the Gun in China: Retelling Political Control Over the PLA

Monika Chansoria

In perhaps the largest military reforms being executed in many decades of the recorded history of China's military modernisation, three new military branches were created on 31 December 2015. The Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is also the Chairman of the most powerful military body, the Central Military Commission (CMC), founded and conferred military flags to the three newly constituted wings, namely, General Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Rocket Force, and Strategic Support Force. Xi simultaneously named the commanders and respective political commissars for all the three branches. The reforms have specifically been directed at the military leadership and command system.

The PLA's four traditional 'general departments' that formerly served as both the headquarters of the PLA (PLA), and as a joint staff for the entire military, stand dismantled and have been replaced by 15 new CMC functional departments. Simultaneously, the seven military regions (MRs) (军区) have ceased to exist and paved way for five theatre commands

Dr **Monika Chansoria** is a Tokyo-based Resident Visiting Fellow at The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA). She is also a Senior Fellow and Head of the China-study Programme, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.

(战区) instead. More importantly, according to the guideline released by the CMC, it has become in-charge of the overall administration of the PLA, People's Armed Police, militia, and reserves. While the freshly constituted joint theatre commands focus on combat preparedness, the services continue to remain in-charge of overall development.

Now reportedly afoot, a sweeping transformation of China's military, with tremendous implications for its strategy and operations, amid Xi's vigorous efforts to realise his dream of a strong country with a strong military, are finally surfacing. Xi is credited with stressing upon four main points: adjust China's military leadership and command system, optimise structure and function, reform policies and systems, and, promote deeper civil-military integration.¹ Xi became the Chairman of China's Central Military Commission and General Secretary of the Party in November 2012 and thereafter the President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in March 2013. The reforms have strengthened Xi Jinping's role within the CMC under what is being labelled a 'CMC Chairman Responsibility System'. The 'CMC Chairmanship Responsibility System' is distinguished from the so-called CMC vice-chairman responsibility system allegedly practiced under Jiang and Hu, where many routine duties were handled by the CMC vice-chairmen.² In contrast, 'all significant issues in national defence and army building [are] planned and decided by the CMC chairman', and 'once the decision has been made, the chairman conducts "concentrated unified leadership" and "efficient command" of the entire military'.³

The *Liberation Army Daily* carried a commentary without revealing the identity of the 'staff commentator' who wrote the authoritative piece that the responsibility system is the 'highest leadership authority and command authority of the units belonging to the party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission', led by the chairman.⁴ The article emphasised that the 'CMC Chairman Responsibility System' should be credited with 'achieving a long period of peace and stability for the party and the state'.⁵

The refurbishment of China's military strategy to meet the missions and strategic tasks of the Chinese Armed Forces extends to its existing

command and control system, which remains firmly under the authority residing with the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. During his visit to Chinese military's new Joint Battle Command Centre in April 2016 in the Beijing facility of real-time operational data, Xi Jinping was repeatedly referred to as the PLA's 'Commander-in-Chief of Joint Operations'—a title last used between 1949 and 1954 by Zhu De, the radical general under Chairman Mao, who served largely in honorary roles including being Vice-Chairman of the National Defence Council and the Central People's Government Council (1949–54). Interestingly, even Mao was not addressed as the 'Commander-in-Chief'. A retired PLA Major General, Xu Guangyu, states that the title of Commander-in-Chief has a different function from his post as CMC Chairman in that '...the CMC is responsible for the PLA's management and defence building, while the joint battle command centre focuses on combat and relevant strategies.' The PLA has been focussing on strengthening the study of command theories, training of command skills and situation-handling drills to enhance actual command capabilities. Besides, also being highlighted is the dominance of the ground forces in the PLA coming to an end, with the elevation of the profile and role of the PLA Navy, Air Force and Strategic Rocket Force, as they gear up to prepare and fight the twenty-first century battles. Formerly controlled by the Army-dominated General Staff Department, the PLA's Army, Air Force, Navy and Strategic Rocket Force now report directly to the CMC—signalling centralised decision-making under CMC Chairman Xi Jinping.

China's Cult Leadership Under Xi Jinping

Traditional analysis of China's civil-military relations assumes that the relationship between the Communist Party of China (CCP) and the PLA remains symbiotic, without functional differentiation or technical specialisation-based institutional boundaries. Such a symbiosis largely was attributed to Mao Zedong's reliance on a strategy of manpower-based mass mobilisation rather than functional and technical specialisation-based expertise and administrative efficacy for his revolutionary agenda

and post-revolutionary development.⁶ The rise of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, however, led to the replacement of Mao's revolutionary agenda with a nation-building project of 'four modernisations'. These were modernising industry, agriculture, science as well as technology, and national defence. It was recognised that technical expertise and administrative efficiency based on a division of labour are indispensable for such tasks. While Mao wanted 'politics to take command' in the PLA, the civil-military relations in China, during the post-Deng era became clearer, with the latter enjoying more institutional autonomy to pursue its functional and technical expertise.⁷

The mobilisation of armed forces against domestic political opposition or inserting them into domestic politics constitutes what Samuel Huntington termed 'subjective control'. This aims to enhance civilian power by a 'divide and rule' strategy of 'politicising' the military. Subjective control is based on the premise that the undesirable military intervention in politics is caused not by weak or failed civilian governance but rather by excessive institutional autonomy and professionalism of the military.⁸ 'Objective control', in contrast, is based on the premise that coups and the like are in fact caused by weak or failed civilian governance or by the inability of civilian authorities to resolve major socio-economic, political, or foreign-policy crises. It is not a product of military professionalism, because the military is mainly a conservative organisation that prefers narrow functional and technical expertise to the broad and complex area of politics.⁹ Nan Li argues that post Deng leadership—Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, prevented the PLA from intervening in intra-CCP and intra-societal political struggle, by changing the dominant paradigm of Chinese civil-military relations from subjective control to 'objective control with Chinese characteristics'.¹⁰

At a CMC expanded conference in late 2004, Hu Jintao introduced a new military policy that defined the four missions of the PLA. These four missions were as follows:

- To 'serve as an important source of strength for consolidating the party's governing position' (为党巩固执政地位 提供重要的力量保证);

- To ‘provide a strong security guarantee for the important period of strategic opportunity for national development’ (为维护国家发展的重要战略机遇期提供坚强的安全保障);
- To ‘serve as a forceful strategic support for safeguarding national interests’ (为维护国家利益提供有力的战略支撑); and
- To ‘play an important role in upholding world peace and promoting common development’ (为维护世界和平与促进共同发展发挥重要作用).¹¹

Owing to his political capital, his association with the PLA and having witnessed military diplomacy up close, Xi Jinping’s control over the PLA is far greater than both Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, who struggled to coagulate their authority during their respective tenures.

Owing to his political capital, his association with the PLA and having witnessed military diplomacy up close, Xi Jinping’s control over the PLA is far greater than both Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, who struggled to coagulate their authority during their respective tenures. Xi Jinping is giving out a clear message on who calls the shots in China, unlike his predecessor Hu Jintao. Recall that Hu had been challenged by the then Politburo Standing Committee member, Zhou Yongkang (in-charge of the entire law-enforcement apparatus, from the police, secret police, and judiciary). Zhou Yongkang’s downfall is the second chapter of the Bo Xilai saga. Retiring Politburo Standing members have tried to pick their own successors. Zhou Yongkang picked Bo Xilai as the Secretary of Political and Legal Affairs—a suspected attempt to challenge Xi Jinping’s power. Xi Jinping plans to use Zhou Yongkang as a milestone in his anti-corruption campaign. He seemingly seeks to break the unwritten rule that Politburo Standing members are immune to any legal punishment. Zhou is presently being tried for corruption charges and his investigation and trial grabbed international headlines primarily because Zhou is among the highest-ranking officials to have been subjected to the kind of trial that was unheard of in China ever since the Party took over in 1949.

While popularising his image among the Chinese masses, Xi is making an astute and deliberate attempt to strengthen his grip on power, especially

Xi Jinping has offered enough evidence of his personal determination and grit with his ruthless anti-corruption campaign in the military. Contrarily, he has exercised remarkable caution in his personnel management of the PLA's top brass, thus far.

by placing effective checks on the power elite. The most profound manifestation of this came in the form of reducing membership of the most powerful political decision-making body of the CCP—the Politburo Standing Committee—from nine to seven members. Noteworthy is that no member, as of now, is exclusively responsible for domestic security, and it remains Xi Jinping's fief.¹² Moreover, the PLA owes open allegiance to Xi Jinping with state-run and controlled newspapers carrying full-page expressions of absolute loyalty by military commanders across regions¹³ as an attempt to quell any form of rift between the Party and the PLA, as has been debated frequently.

The anti-corruption campaign is indeed the most potent source of Xi's power over China's military. Xi Jinping is sparing no political elite when it comes to charges of corruption, and by doing so, in effect, is neutralising all potential political rivalry that could threaten his power and control, in any way. According to Nan Li at the Naval War College, through his anti-corruption campaign, Xi has 'shown ability to impose his will on the PLA'—a skill that his predecessor Hu Jintao lacked utterly and that Jiang Zemin wielded inconsistently.¹⁴ Hu Jintao had a more hands-off approach delegating day-to-day running of the PLA to his two CMC vice-chairmen, and that surely differs enormously from Xi's hands-on leadership style. During Hu's time as Chairman, no major military reform took place. If Xi pushes for structural changes to the CMC and personnel shake-ups that break with Jiang Zemin-era norms, this would indeed add credibility to the narrative that he prioritises expanding his own power base over improving the effectiveness of the PLA.¹⁵ Xi Jinping has offered enough evidence of his personal determination and grit with his ruthless anti-corruption campaign in the military. Contrarily, he has exercised remarkable caution in his personnel management of the PLA's top brass, thus far. The Politics and Law Commission, the Commission for Discipline Inspection or the

Audit Office (all under direct CMC supervision) have come out as clear winners of this overhaul. Since the 15 units newly created under the CMC include the Discipline Inspection Commission, the Politics and Legal Affairs Commission and the Audit Office, the new set up will aid Xi in his efforts to fight corruption at higher levels of the PLA while reinforcing his grip over the military.¹⁶

Gutian Congress

A reflection of Xi's determination to further strengthen his control over the PLA came to being witnessed when he drew a direct line between the era of Mao Zedong with the present at a landmark meeting in Gutian in November 2014, to mark the commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the Gutian Congress during which, Mao first affirmed the famous 1929 dictum ... *political power grows out of the barrel of a gun*. Xi convened 420 of his most senior officers to meet in this small town situated in south-eastern Fujian Province.¹⁷ The 1929 Gutian Congress was held on 1 November 2014 in the Shanghang County. It was the ninth meeting of the Chinese Communist Party since its founding in 1921, and the first following the Nanchang Uprising in August 1927 that marked the founding of the Red Army. Most of the attendees of the 1929 Congress were soldiers, and Mao Zedong chaired the meeting as the Comintern-appointed political commissar.¹⁸ The lasting legacy of the Gutian meeting was Mao's criticism of what he called 'the purely military viewpoint'. Mao criticised a number of wayward views in the military beginning with the belief that 'military affairs and politics were opposed to each other', even going so far as to say that 'military affairs [had] a leading position over politics'.¹⁹ The second was the incorrect view that the task of the Red Army 'is merely to fight', instead of serving as 'an armed body for carrying out the political tasks of the revolution' as well as

A reflection of Xi's determination to further strengthen his control over the PLA came to being witnessed when he drew a direct line between the era of Mao Zedong with the present at a landmark meeting in Gutian in November 2014, to mark the commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the Gutian Congress during which, Mao first affirmed the famous 1929 dictum ... *political power grows out of the barrel of a gun*.

Professional militaries, the world over, foremost serve the survival and interests of the State. In case of China's PLA, it has been an exceedingly politicised 'Party's army' ever since its inception.

'doing propaganda among the masses, organising the masses, arming them, helping them establish revolutionary political power and setting up political organisations'.²⁰ Perceptibly, the Gutian Conference became the seminal moment where the principle of CCP's control of the military was enshrined as a core party doctrine, and 'set the tone for the army's political work during the revolutionary era' and beyond.²¹

As per successive reports filed by *Xinhua*, all members of the CMC showed up at the 2014 Gutian Conference including Fan Changlong, Xu Qiliang, Chang Wanquan, Fang Fenghui, Zhang Yang, Zhao Keshi, Zhang Youxia, Wu Shengli, Ma Xiaotian, and Wei Fenghe.²² Additional non-military attendees included Politburo member Wang Huning and CCP General Office Director Li Zhanshu.²³ The rest of the crowd was drawn from 'relevant leaders of the four general headquarters, the major leaders and political department directors of the large units, leaders of CMC General Office, political commissars of quasi-military regions and army-level units, the relevant comrades of the general headquarters and large units' offices, representatives of the grassroots and heroic models, and the relevant leaders of Ministry of Public Security'.²⁴

PLA's Political Work System

Chairman Mao's statement on the Party's absolute control over the military continues to hold ground in present-day China with PLA's political work system being the principal means through which the CPC 'controls the gun'. Professional militaries, the world over, foremost serve the survival and interests of the State. In case of China's PLA, it has been an exceedingly politicised 'Party's army' ever since its inception. Perhaps, the most vital of PLA's missions, is guaranteeing the regime's enduring survival, above everything else. China's state-controlled media is known to berate the very idea of 'apolitical militaries'. The communiqué released at the sixth plenum of the 18th CCP Central Committee urged the Party to

‘... closely unite around the Central Committee with Xi Jinping as the “core”.’ Senior leadership of the Party, beginning from provinces, regions and provincial-level cities have already begun referring to Xi as their ‘core leader’ and display open allegiance. For instance, Party Secretary of Tibet, Chen Quanguo, announced resolute safeguarding of ‘... the absolute authority of the party centre under Comrade Xi Jinping as general secretary... Staunchly safeguard, support and be faithful to General Secretary Xi Jinping, the core.’ When Xi Jinping visited the newly established CMC Joint Battle Command Centre (军委联指总指挥) on 20 April 2016, he was decorated with the new title of ‘Commander-in-Chief’ (总司令)—fuelling speculations on Xi being now on par with the revolutionary general Zhu De who had held this title until 1954.

The military reforms convey an unambiguous message by Xi Jinping: the Party, through the CMC, remains firmly in control. In fact, Xi has further tightened his grip over the PLA by assuming a more direct role as head of the new Joint Operations Command Centre, which puts him in-charge of the operational command of the PLA’s military operations and plans. This new role holds tremendous political significance. The tiers of political work in the PLA are interlocking and reinforcing systems, which provide the Party to infiltrate the military hierarchy, beginning with the political commissars, the Party committee system, and the Party discipline inspection system. By constituting the Discipline Inspection Commission specifically for the PLA, and making it answerable directly to the CMC, Xi has stiffened the noose around China’s military elite—thereby ensuring that the Party’s political control over the gun continues unabated, and the loyalty of the gun remains to the Party, followed by, to the State.

Xi has further tightened his grip over the PLA by assuming a more direct role as head of the new Joint Operations Command Centre, which puts him in-charge of the operational command of the PLA’s military operations and plans.

By constituting the Discipline Inspection Commission specifically for the PLA, and making it answerable directly to the CMC, Xi has stiffened the noose around China’s military elite

The PLA is highly centralised with low levels of horizontal integration. Most personnel spend their entire careers within a single chain of command and most units having infrequent contact with units outside their chain of command.

China's defence spending is the second largest in the world following the US, and accounts for about 41 per cent of the total military spending in Asia, including Oceania. It chalked up an 11 per cent increase in 2015 from the previous year, much larger than the region's average increase of slightly less than 3 per cent, although China told the current session of the National People's Congress that its defence spending for 2016 will rise about 7 to 8 per cent from 2015. According to an estimate, China's defence spending in real terms is 1.4 times the publicly announced figure.²⁵ China aims to complete military reform

and have armed forces capable of informationised warfare by 2020, according to a recently published 13th five-year *Military Development Plan (2016–2020)* issued by the CMC. By 2020, the PLA will have finished mechanisation of all forces and progressed in incorporating information and computer technology. The priorities include strategic restructuring of different services, development of weaponry and logistics, IT facilities, combat training and international military cooperation. More resources will be directed to projects that enhance combat readiness.²⁶

Old Bottlenecks Galore

Despite all the major disbandment and shuffles, among the key remaining obstacle is the continuing army dominance of PLA's command organisations. The dominance by the Ground Forces seemingly continues with all the commanders and four of the five political commissars of the ostensibly joint theatre commands being PLAA officers.²⁷ The PLA is highly centralised with low levels of horizontal integration. Most personnel spend their entire careers within a single chain of command and most units having infrequent contact with units outside their chain of command. Thus, there is a fundamental incompatibility between the nature of the PLA's doctrine and its organisational structure.²⁸ By this count, it appears

that the recent structural changes are designed to *increase* the centralisation of the PLA, instead of decreasing it. Abolishing the general departments and moving their functions to the CMC will tend to have the effect of increasing central control over these functions. The PLA has adopted a ‘CMC chairmanship responsibility system’, under which ‘all significant issues in national defence and army building’ will be ‘planned and decided by the CMC chairman’, as compared to previously, when senior officers at the CMC, general departments, and military regions were allowed to make some of these decisions on their own.²⁹ The effects of this movement toward more centralised control

To exploit ephemeral opportunities tactically in today’s wars, an agile and decentralised military setup with lower levels of standardisation, and a higher degree of horizontal integration has become an essential prerequisite.

at the upper levels of the PLA are likely to permeate down to lower levels, resulting in an organisation that is even more centralised than previously.³⁰ To exploit ephemeral opportunities tactically in today’s wars, an agile and decentralised military set up with lower levels of standardisation, and a higher degree of horizontal integration has become an essential prerequisite. The on-going overhaul and reorganisation of the PLA structure does attempt to meet these objectives, however still seems to be a tall order.

Conclusion

Over the last two decades the role of the PLA in Chinese elite politics has largely been shaped by the reduced PLA role in political institutions and reduced emphasis on political work within the PLA.³¹ Leading editorials and opinion pieces in mainstream Chinese state-controlled media have highlighted that military reforms have been brought in wake of the ‘constantly changing international situation’ that directly impacts upon the tasks of the Chinese army to secure the nation’s national interests. The PLA, apparently, is said to be ‘adjusting to keep up with the pace of China’s rise’. Most of these reforms are likely to begin yielding results by 2020. What is most critical here is the timing. The year

The year 2021 establishes 100 years since founding of the Chinese Communist Party and 2049 ushers 100 years of the People's Republic of China coming into existence as a nation-state. Realisation of these twin bicentennial goals remains the nucleus of Xi Jinping's 'China Dream'

As much as China bawls for what it describes as 'peaceful rise/development' coupled with incessant banality that Beijing shall 'never seek hegemony'—the constant attempts to create a fresh status quo in almost all its existing territorial disputes in the East China Sea, South China Sea and those in land boundary, suggest otherwise.

2021 establishes 100 years since founding of the Chinese Communist Party and 2049 ushers 100 years of the People's Republic of China coming into existence as a nation-state. Realisation of these twin bicentennial goals remains the nucleus of Xi Jinping's 'China Dream' most significantly including the vital goal of national rejuvenation (read reunification).

Although China claims to have opened up as a society far more than it ever was, at least for global public consumption, the lack of credible inputs in terms of information dissemination continue to pose grave hurdles while studying civil-military relations and the military's influence on elite politics. Interestingly, experts and analysts in China are arguing that the mission of armed forces stretches beyond the nation's maritime and land territories. This clearly brings out the dichotomy in China's interpretation and application of power, both militarily and politically. As much as China bawls for what it describes as 'peaceful rise/development' coupled with incessant banality that Beijing shall 'never seek hegemony'—the constant attempts to create a fresh status quo in almost all its existing territorial disputes in the East China Sea, South China Sea and those in land boundary, suggest otherwise. The message that Xi Jinping has conveyed by virtue of these reforms is clear: the Party, through the CMC, is firmly in control, and in fact, has further tightened its grip over the PLA. According to the guideline released by the CMC, a new structure will be established in which the CMC will take charge of the overall

administration of the PLA, the People's Armed Police, the militia and reserve forces.

All these developments are taking place at an opportune time for Xi Jinping, primarily since they will enable him to pick his cohort for the 2017 Party Congress, in which a new Standing Committee will be constituted, which is the nucleus of China's decision-making power apparatus. Five of the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee are expected to step down after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 68 at the 2017 autumn's Party Congress, and new representatives will be announced for the 25-member CCP Politburo. The year 2017 will probably consolidate Xi's hold over the political and military affairs of the State, with the 19th Party Congress in 2017 fast becoming the pronounced litmus test for Xi Jinping's future leadership style and role. It is in this backdrop that the question remains: Will Xi consolidate his power and seek to retain control for yet another term post-2022, or, would he pave way for an anointed successor during the 2022 Party Congress? While Xi is expected to be backed with certainty for a second term until 2022, what he is likely to ultimately seek for, is the continuing influence of his political relic within the Party, and further, in the Party's unceasing control over the PLA. While the title of 'core' leader puts Xi on par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, the litmus test for Xi would be ensuring economic stability throughout China and prevail through the economic muddle given that China's economic growth rate is becoming progressively difficult to predict with precision. Economic steadiness has often been interpreted as an essential pre-requisite to preserve the communist regime's continuing reign in China. A dwindling economic chart could cause far-reaching social strife—a scenario that any Chinese leader, 'core' or otherwise, would dread to grapple with. And to meet this challenge, which could well threaten the regime's survival, the PLA would be expected to serve as the ultimate guarantor—a guarantor that has not fought a major combat war since 1979.

Notes

1. Andrew S. Erickson, 'Sweeping Change in China's Military: Xi's PLA Restructuring', *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2015.
2. Sun Chiaye [孫嘉業] 'Who is Responsible on the Central Military Commission?' [中央軍委誰負責?] *Ming Pao* [明報], 29 January 2015, cited in James Mulvenon, 'The Yuan Stops Here: Xi Jinping and the "CMC Chairman Responsibility System"', *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 47, Summer 2015, available at www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm47jm.pdf
3. Mulvenon, *ibid.*
4. Staff Commentator, 'The Work System Must Be Made Stricter and More Realistic—Discussion Three on Putting Great Efforts Into Strengthening the Building of the Various Levels of Party Committee Leading Groups', *Liberation Army Daily*, 28 January 2015, p. 1.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Nan Li, 'Chinese Civil–Military Relations in the Post-Deng Era: Implications for Crisis Management and Naval Modernization', *China Maritime Studies*, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, No. 4, January 2010, p. 2.
7. Nan Li, 'Political-Military Changes in China, 1979–1989', *Security Studies* 2, No. 4, Winter 1994/1995, pp. 2-3.
8. For more details see, Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. 1, 27–29; W. H. Morris Jones, 'Armed Forces and the State', *Public Administration*, No. 25, Winter 1957, pp. 411–16, as cited in Li, n. 6.
9. Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 80–85; See, Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 193–94.
10. Li, n. 6, p. 4.
11. As cited in 杨春长 (Major General Yang Chunchang) and 刘义焕 (Senior Colonel Liu Yihuan) '科学认识和把握我军新的历史使命' (Scientifically Comprehend and Handle the New Historical Missions of Our Army) *Military Art Journal*, No. 11, 2005.
12. For more details see, 'The Power of Xi Jinping', *The Economist*, 20 September 2014.
13. *Ibid.*
14. As cited in Erickson, n. 1.
15. Dirk H Schmidt, 'No Radical Break With the Past in China's Military Reform Programme', Blog post, Mercator Institute for China Studies, Berlin, 7 October 2016.
16. *Ibid.*
17. James C. Mulvenon, 'Hotel Gutian: We Haven't Had That Spirit Here Since 1929', *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 46, Hoover Institution, Winter 2015.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Mao Zedong, 'On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party', December 1929, *Collected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol.1, available at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_5.htm

20. Ibid., cited in Mulvenon, n. 17.
21. 'Xi Urges Serious Reflection on Xu Caihou's Case', *China Daily*, 1 November 2014, cited in Mulvenon, n. 2.
22. Cao Zhi and Li Xuanliang, 'All-PLA Political Work Conference Concludes at Gutian; Fan Changlong, Xu Qiliang Attend and Address the Conference', *Xinhua* release, 2 November 2014.
23. Cao Zhi and Li Xuanliang, '(Military) All-Army Political Work Conference Held in Gutian', *Xinhua*, 1 November 2014.
24. Ibid., cited in Mulvenon, n. 17.
25. 'China's Sweeping Military Reform', Opinion, *The Japan Times*, 8 March 2016.
26. According to a *Xinhua*, May 2016.
27. Roger Cliff, 'Chinese Military Reforms: A Pessimistic Take', *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 83, 4th Quarter 2016, p. 54.
28. Ibid., p. 55.
29. Ibid., p. 56.
30. Although this does not change the number of organizational layers between them and the commander of the China's Armed Forces (President and CMC Chairman Xi Jinping); for more details see, Cliff, n. 21, p. 56.
31. For related references and detailed debate on elite politics in China, see, Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, 'Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA's Role in Elite Politics', *China Strategic Perspectives*, No. 2, August 2010, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., p. 1.