

# MP-IDSA

## *Issue Brief*

# Xi Jinping, the Chinese Military and the Struggle for Power

*Abhishek Kumar Darbey*

February 19, 2026

## **S***ummary*

The Chinese military has been in disarray since early 2023. Dozens of senior PLA officers, mostly lieutenant generals and generals, have been investigated and prosecuted. Five of the seven members of the Central Military Commission (CMC) are either under investigation or already on trial.

## Introduction

Two senior PLA Generals Zhang Youxia, Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and Liu Zhenli, Director of the CMC Joint Staff Department, are being investigated on suspicion of ‘serious violations of discipline and law’, as per the Chinese Ministry of National Defense (MND) on 24 January 2026.<sup>1</sup> In the Chinese system, the term ‘serious violations of discipline and law’ means the accused is suspected of major economic crimes, abuse of power, or political betrayal.<sup>2</sup> The *PLA Daily* editorial on 26 January 2026 noted that Zhang Youxia was accused of ‘seriously undermining and destroying the system of responsibility of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission’.<sup>3</sup>

These developments are significant given that Zhang Youxia, 75, was the second-most powerful military officer, and his dismissal is being compared to the fall of Lin Biao, then Vice Chairman of the CMC, in 1971.<sup>4</sup> Zhang Youxia has also been a second-generation family friend and one of Xi Jinping's closest confidants since Xi came to power in October 2012.<sup>5</sup> Some analysts argue that Zhang Youxia's fall is attributable to recent rifts between Xi Jinping and Zhang Youxia.<sup>6</sup> While no concrete evidence of such rifts has been provided, it is evident that the Chinese military has been in disarray since the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2022.<sup>7</sup>

With the fall of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli, the CMC is left with only two members—Xi Jinping, the Chairman, and Zhang Shengmin, the Vice Chairman, who is the only military officer in the highest decision-making body of the Chinese military. Zhang Shengmin is a political commissar without any experience in military operations. Throughout his PLA career, he has served in various political departments of the PLA and the discipline inspection commission of the CMC.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Liu Shangjing, “[Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli are Under Investigation for Suspected Serious Violations of Discipline and Law](#) (张又侠、刘振立涉嫌严重违纪违法被立案审查调查)”, Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, 24 January 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Hawkins, “[Fate of China's Top General More Likely to Do With Power Struggle Than Corruption](#)”, *The Guardian*, 26 January 2026.

<sup>3</sup> De Zheng (德正), “[Why Won't Xi Jinping Let Zhang Youxia Go?](#) (习近平为何不放过张又侠?)”, *Deutsche Welle*, 29 January 2026.

<sup>4</sup> “[Zhang Youxia as the Second Lin Biao: How the Chinese Communist Party is Racing Toward Collapse](#)”, *Vision Times*, 25 January 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Hawkins and agencies, “[China's Top General Under Investigation for Alleged Violations Amid Corruption Crackdown](#)”, *The Guardian*, 26 January 2026.

<sup>6</sup> Rishika Singh, “[As China Purges Top Military General Zhang Youxia, the Key Theories Around the Extraordinary Move](#)”, *The Indian Express*, 27 January 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen McDonnell, “[China Has Purged Its Highest-ranked Military General. Why?](#)”, *BBC*, 27 January 2026.

<sup>8</sup> “[Zhang Shengmin](#) (张升民)”, Baidu, 2026.

## Power Moves

Analysts note that the urgency of Xi Jinping’s actions may indicate that he is seeking to eliminate any potential power challenge before the next Party Congress in 2027.<sup>9</sup> Since early 2023, rumours of discord between Xi Jinping and Zhang Youxia have circulated. The rumours were based on the corruption investigation into PLA Rocket Force procurement, in which several of Zhang Youxia’s associates were involved. The investigation spread to the defence industry, theatre commands and core departments of the CMC.<sup>10</sup> By June 2024, 12 senior PLA officials, mostly lieutenant generals and generals, had been persecuted.<sup>11</sup>

In retaliation, the anti-Xi Jinping faction began targeting Xi Jinping’s close associates within the CMC to limit his power within the Chinese military.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, in November 2024, one of Xi Jinping’s closest confidants, General Miao Hua, Member of the CMC, was arrested on charges of ‘serious violations of discipline and law’.<sup>13</sup> To further pressure Xi Jinping, in March 2025, another close confidant, He Weidong, a second-rank Vice Chairman of the CMC, was arrested during a corruption investigation.<sup>14</sup>

The investigation found both Miao Hua and He Weidong guilty, and in October 2025, both were persecuted and expelled from the CPC and the PLA.<sup>15</sup> According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Zhang Youxia was accused of ‘forming cliques’ and abusing his power in military decision-making.<sup>16</sup> Liu Zhenli, the fallen PLA general, is said to have had a long association with Zhang Youxia. The two have participated in the Liangshan Campaign against Vietnam in the 1980s and were reportedly in a superior–subordinate relationship at the time.<sup>17</sup>

Reports suggest that the internal power struggle within the CPC entered a critical stage in mid-January 2026 and that a previously concealed, fierce struggle within

---

<sup>9</sup> Julian E. Barnes, [“Paranoiac” Xi Jinping? How US Intelligence Officials Assess the CCP’s Purge \(偏执狂\)习近平? 美国情报官员如何评估中共清洗\)](#), *The New York Times*, 4 February 2026.

<sup>10</sup> [“Even the Second-in-Command Has Fallen... Xi Jinping Completes ‘Military Reshuffle’ \(连二把手也落马...习近平完成“军队换血\)”](#), *The Chosun Daily*, 12 February 2026.

<sup>11</sup> Abhishek Darbey, [“Xi Jinping’s Crackdown on Corruption in the PLA”](#), Issue Brief, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), 15 July 2025.

<sup>12</sup> [“‘China’s Coup’—What Lies Behind the Downfall of General Zhang Youxia? \(中国政变”——扳倒将领张又侠的背后潜藏着什么?\)”](#), *China Worker Forum*, 30 January 2026.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan A. Czin, [“Thoughts on the Political Demise of Miao Hua”](#), Brookings, 18 February 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Tessa Wong, [“Chinese Communist Party Expels Top Generals in Sweeping Military Crackdown”](#), *BBC*, 17 October 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Eduardo Jaramillo and Michael Donmoyer, [“Military Purges at China’s Fourth Plenum Have Implications for Readiness”](#), *CNA*, 19 November 2025.

<sup>16</sup> De Zheng (德正), [“Why Won’t Xi Jinping Let Zhang Youxia Go? \(习近平为何不放过张又侠?\)”](#), no. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Shen Zewei, [“Analysis: Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli’s Downfall May Involve Cliques and Factions; Taiwan Strait Situation is Expected to Stabilize in the Short Term \(张又侠刘振立落马分析: 或涉团团伙伙 台海短期趋稳定\)”](#), *Zaobao*, 24 January 2026.

the CPC’s inner circle erupted publicly. Analysts argue that the arrest of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli is not merely the arrest of high-ranking CPC and PLA leaders but rather a coup or counter-coup launched by the Xi Jinping faction against rival power groups within the Party.<sup>18</sup> Among the 30 PLA Generals appointed to key positions of the PLA, 13 have either been expelled or are under investigation.<sup>19</sup>

## Xi-Zhang Rivalry

Xi Jinping assumed office in October 2012 at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China and completely reshuffled the top leadership team of the Chinese military. The previous military leadership was under the control of then CMC Vice Chairman Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, who belonged to Jiang Zemin’s faction.<sup>20</sup> The new team of military leadership included experienced, more capable personnel who rose from the grassroots level, including Zhang Youxia, who was appointed Head of the CMC General Armaments Department.<sup>21</sup> Although Xi Jinping and Zhang Youxia were second-generation family friends, this was likely their first time working as colleagues at the CMC. Some analysts suggest that Zhang Youxia played a crucial role in supporting and maintaining Xi Jinping’s power. However, discord between the two senior-most leaders emerged at the start of Xi Jinping’s third term, following the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC in October 2022.<sup>22</sup>

Zhang Youxia is the son of Zhang Zongxun, one of the founding generals of the PLA. He was a member of the Political Bureau of the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee and First-ranked Vice Chairman of the CMC.<sup>23</sup> Zhang Youxia, born in 1950, joined the PLA in 1968 at the age of 18. He is known for his participation in the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War and the 1984 Battle of Laoshan against Vietnam.<sup>24</sup> Analysts argue that Zhang Youxia wielded considerable power within the Chinese military, holding multiple senior positions and building a strong network over more than five decades of service.

---

<sup>18</sup> [“‘China’s Coup’—What Lies Behind the Downfall of General Zhang Youxia? \(‘中国政变’——扳倒将领张又侠的背后潜藏着什么?\)”](#), no. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Amy Chang Chien, Agnes Chang and Chris Buckley, [“China’s Disappearing Generals”](#), *The New York Times*, 3 February 2026.

<sup>20</sup> [“Exclusive Breaking News: Why Xi Jinping Dares Not Strike First to Take Down Zhang Youxia \(独家重磅：习近平为何不敢先下手为强拿下张又侠\)”](#), Wenxue City, 28 April 2025.

<sup>21</sup> [“Zhang Youxia Repelled an Enemy Counterattack During the Sino-Vietnamese War, Resulting in 3,000 Vietnamese Casualties \(张又侠曾在对越作战中阻敌反攻 越阵亡 3000 人\)”](#), *Global People Magazine*, 8 November 2012.

<sup>22</sup> [“‘China’s Coup’—What Lies Behind the Downfall of General Zhang Youxia? \(‘中国政变’——扳倒将领张又侠的背后潜藏着什么?\)”](#), no. 12.

<sup>23</sup> [“Zhang Youxia \(张又侠\)”](#), Baidu, 2026.

<sup>24</sup> Cheng Li, [“Zhang Youxia 张又侠”](#), John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings, October 2017.

Some analysts argue that Zhang Youxia’s appointment as Head of the CMC General Armament Department in October 2012 was due to the support of CPC leaders, and it has little to do with his decades-long friendship with Xi Jinping.<sup>25</sup> The *Deutsche Welle* report claims that, being a princeling, Zhang Youxia maintained close ties with several CPC leaders, which, to some extent, undermined Xi Jinping’s authority in the military. With the support of veteran CPC leaders, he retained his position as CMC Vice Chairman at the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC, even at the age of 72, which was unusual. This report also claims that during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses in 2012–2017 and 2017–2022, Xi Jinping acted as ‘commander-in-chief leading from the front’ to implement various military reforms. However, this pattern ceased in early 2023 due to obstacles to the implementation of Xi Jinping’s order. The report argues that Zhang Youxia was wary of Xi Jinping’s motives in promoting himself through a personality cult.<sup>26</sup>

*The Economist* reports that in recent years, there has been a persistent power struggle within the Chinese military between the ‘Zhang Youxia faction’ and officers from the Eastern Theatre Command, who are closely associated with Xi Jinping, dating back to his service in Fujian Province from 1985 to 2002. Xi Jinping has deep ties with some officers of the PLA 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army stationed in Xiamen, Fujian, where he served as a local government official for 17 years, from June 1985 to October 2002.<sup>27</sup> For instance, Xi Jinping’s two<sup>28</sup> close associates among the CMC Members were Miao Hua<sup>29</sup> and He Weidong; both served in the PLA 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army in Xiamen, where Xi Jinping held various posts, including vice-mayor of the city. It is probably the decline of his associates from the former PLA 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army, which Xi Jinping had cultivated for many years, which left him deeply frustrated and angry.<sup>30</sup>

In June 2025, Michael Flynn, US National Security Advisor during Trump’s first term, raised “rumours of Xi Jinping’s downfall” on social media. Zhang Youxia was featured as a central figure. After Miao Hua, CMC Member and Director of the CMC Political Department, and He Weidong, CMC Vice Chairman, both of whom were considered as checks on Zhang Youxia’s power, were removed from their positions; rumours circulated that “Zhang Youxia was plotting against Xi Jinping”.<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, Miao Hua and Xi Jinping were both posted to Fujian Province for an extended period. Miao

---

<sup>25</sup> De Zheng (德正), “[Why Won't Xi Jinping Let Zhang Youxia Go? \(习近平为何不放过张又侠?\)](#)”, no. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “[Xi Jinping in Fujian \(XIV\): ‘Comrade Xi Jinping is Capable of Achieving the Unity of a Prosperous Country and a Strong Military’](#) (习近平在福建（十四）：“习近平同志能够实现富国和强军的统一）”, *Study Times*, 27 February 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Yuanyue Dang, “[Top PLA Heads Have Rolled But China’s Hunt for Corrupt Military Officials May be Here to Stay](#)”, *South China Morning Post*, 14 November 2025.

<sup>29</sup> “[Miao Hua \(苗华\)](#)”, Baidu, 2026.

<sup>30</sup> De Zheng (德正), “[Why Won't Xi Jinping Let Zhang Youxia Go? \(习近平为何不放过张又侠?\)](#)”, no. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Hua joined the PLA at age 14 and, during his early career from 1969 to 2001, served in the PLA 31<sup>st</sup> Group Army based in Fujian. Xi Jinping joined the PLA as vice-mayor of Xiamen, Fujian, in 1985 and served in the province until 2002. Public records show that Miao Hua has been a confidant of Xi Jinping since their service in Fujian.<sup>32</sup>

Chinese commentators note that Xi Jinping’s actions against Zhang Youxia were not a spur-of-the-moment decision but rather the result of careful planning since late 2022.<sup>33</sup> It is contended that Xi Jinping tacitly allowed He Weidong and Miao Hua to carry out a large-scale purge of Li Shangfu and his associates to weaken Zhang Youxia’s influence in the military. The analysts believe that, after the rift between the two senior-most leaders erupted in 2022, Zhang Youxia became the most troublesome figure for Xi Jinping. By 2022, Zhang Youxia held several senior positions in the PLA and was among the most powerful military leaders in China. Moreover, given his identity as a ‘second-generation red gene’, Zhang Youxia was part of the powerful CPC princelings network. Furthermore, he was one of the longest-serving generals in the PLA, spanning a career of 58 years, from a foot soldier to vice chairman of the CMC.<sup>34</sup>

For the first time, Minnie Chan, a reporter for the *South China Morning Post*, reported in early 2023 on the emergence of a rift between Xi Jinping and Zhang Youxia. She also confirmed that Xi Jinping’s faction had planned to take action against Zhang Youxia. Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu, a close associate of Zhang Youxia, along with five PLA generals, were arrested for corruption investigation. Previously, Li Shangfu served as Zhang Youxia’s deputy at the CMC General Armament Department from 2013 to 2017.<sup>35</sup> Incidentally, the corruption investigation into Li Shangfu and five other generals concerned the procurement of equipment by the CMC General Equipment Department for the PLA Rocket Force from 2017 onwards.

In response, Zhang Youxia, then 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Chairman of the CMC, began investigations of cases against the ‘Fujian Gang’ of Xi Jinping. Consequently, the CMC members He Weidong and Miao Hua from the ‘Fujian Gang’ were expelled from the CPC and the PLA by October 2025.<sup>36</sup> This episode effectively dismantled Xi Jinping’s ‘Fujian Gang’ within the CMC, an operation orchestrated by Zhang Youxia. The chronology of events suggests a life-and-death power struggle between Zhang Youxia’s faction

---

<sup>32</sup> [“China Purges Senior Military Official Miao Hua from Top Ruling Body”](#), *The Hindu*, 27 June 2025.

<sup>33</sup> De Zheng (德正), [“Why Won't Xi Jinping Let Zhang Youxia Go? \(习近平为何不放过张又侠?\)”](#), no. 3.

<sup>34</sup> [“Zhang Youxia \(张又侠\)”](#), Baidu, 2026.

<sup>35</sup> [“Li Shangfu \(李尚福\)”](#), Baidu, 2026.

<sup>36</sup> [“‘China's Coup’—What Lies Behind the Downfall of General Zhang Youxia? \(‘中国政变’——扳倒将领张又侠的背后潜藏着什么?\)”](#), no. 12.

and Xi Jinping’s faction from early 2023 until Zhang Youxia's arrest on 24 January 2026.<sup>37</sup>

One of the striking features of Zhang Youxia’s case is that, unlike in the past, the investigation of his case was announced within five days of his disappearance from the public domain. Zhang Youxia was last seen at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Commission for Discipline Inspection on 12 January 2026.<sup>38</sup> Incidentally, Zhang Youxia did not attend the scheduled events at the Central Party School and at the National Defense University on 20–21 January.<sup>39</sup> Typically, the accused disappears from public view for several months, and the slow process affords the leadership sufficient time to build consensus within the ruling elite and quell dissent. Contrary to standard procedures, it was indicated that the situation was escalating, therefore, prompt action was required.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, unlike in the cases of Miao Hua and He Weidong, the editorials published in the *PLA Daily* have employed uncommon words to describe the crimes of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli. For instance, the *PLA Daily* commentary on 2 February 2026, titled ‘Striving Forward with a Strong Sense of Mission’, stated that the resolute investigation and punishment of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli removed obstacles and stumbling blocks hindering the development of the cause.<sup>41</sup>

## Fall of Zhang Youxia and Chinese State Media’s Response

Editorials published by the official media of the Chinese Ministry of Defence have employed a more severe characterisation than that used for another fallen Vice Chairman of the CMC, He Weidong. For instance, on 25 January, the *PLA Daily* published an editorial titled ‘Resolutely Win the Decisive, Protracted, and Overall War against Corruption in the Military (坚决打赢军队反腐败斗争攻坚战持久战总体战)’. This article argues that the investigation into Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli constitutes another victory in Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign since he took office in 2012.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> [“He Weidong, Miao Hua Expelled from CPC, Military”](#), *Global Times*, 17 October 2025.

<sup>38</sup> [“Even the Second-in-Command Has Fallen... Xi Jinping Completes ‘Military Reshuffle’ \(连二把手也落马...习近平完成‘军队换血’\)”](#), no. 10.

<sup>39</sup> [“Bad news: Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli Confirmed Arrested; Internal Notification Already Issued. In-depth Discussion: Has Xi Jinping Ever Truly Lost Control of the Military? \(坏消息：张又侠刘振立证实被抓 内部已通报 深度讨论：习近平到底有没有失去过军权?\)”](#), *Creaders.net*, 21 January 2026.

<sup>40</sup> [“‘China’s Coup’—What Lies Behind the Downfall of General Zhang Youxia? \(‘中国政变’——扳倒将领张又侠的背后潜藏着什么?\)”](#), no. 12.

<sup>41</sup> [“Zhang Youxia \(张又侠\)”](#), Baidu, 2026.

<sup>42</sup> [“Resolutely Win the Decisive, Protracted, and Overall War of the Anti-Corruption Struggle in the Military \(坚决打赢军队反腐败斗争攻坚战持久战总体战\)”](#), *PLA Daily*, 25 January 2026.

The editorial characterises ‘five-serious political problems’ of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli including ‘seriously betrayed the trust and expectations of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission’; ‘severely trampled on and undermined the Chairman of the Central Military Commission’s responsibility system’; ‘seriously fostered political and corruption problems that affected the Party’s absolute leadership over the military and endangered the Party’s ruling foundation’; ‘seriously damaged the image and prestige of the Central Military Commission’; and ‘seriously impacted the political ideological foundation for the unity and progress of all officers and soldiers’.<sup>43</sup>

The editorial emphasised that Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli have caused great damage to the political building, political ecology and combat effectiveness of the military, and have had an extremely negative impact on the Party, the country and the military. The editorial says that investigating and punishing Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli will further rectify the political situation, eliminate ideological poison and malpractices, and remove corruption from the organisation, consolidating and deepening the results of political rectification, promoting the rebirth of the PLA, and injecting strong impetus into the development of a strong military.<sup>44</sup>

The *PLA Daily* editorial suggests that the case involving Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli is not a case of corruption. The ‘five-serious political problems’ mentioned in the editorial indicate that Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli were involved in activities that threatened the CPC’s absolute leadership over the military and endangered the Party’s ruling foundation. The last point states that their activities have seriously undermined the political-ideological foundation for the unity and progress of all officers and soldiers, implying that they were involved in creating factions within the Chinese military.

If we recall, the *PLA Daily* editorial published on 22 December 2016 titled ‘What is True Loyalty?’ used similar words to depict the cases of two former vice-chairmen of the CMC, Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou. The editorial said that the actions of Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou caused chaos within the Party and the military, and seriously damaged the Party’s unity and cohesion, severely weakened the Party’s creativity, cohesion and fighting capacity, and seriously undermined the system of the Chairman of the CMC’s responsibility.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> [“Resolutely Win the Decisive Battle, Protracted War, and Overall War Against Corruption in the Military](#) (坚决打赢军队反腐败斗争攻坚战持久战总体战)”, *People's Daily*, 25 January 2026.

<sup>44</sup> [“Resolutely Win the Decisive Battle, Protracted War, and Overall War Against Corruption in the Military](#) (坚决打赢军队反腐败斗争攻坚战持久战总体战)”, *Qiushi*, 25 January 2026.

<sup>45</sup> [“Military Media Criticizes Guo and Xu for Pleading Loyalty While Secretly Amassing Wealth; First Time Mentioning Seriously Undermining the Chairman of the Central Military Commission's Responsibility System](#) (軍媒批郭徐嘴上喊忠誠暗裡斂財 首提「嚴重破壞軍委主席負責制」)”, *Hong Kong 01*, 24 December 2016.

The 2016 episode at the CMC was also a case of a power struggle between two rival factions in the Chinese military, and the allegations are similar to those in the January 2026 case, which was alleged to have damaged Party unity. The language of these *PLA Daily* editorials emphasises political betrayal and the challenge to the ‘system of responsibility of the Chairman of the CMC’. This also indicates that it may not be solely a case of corruption but rather a challenge to the Chairman’s leadership. Nonetheless, the editorial sends a cautionary message, ‘if you reach out your hand, you will be caught’, to the PLA, and it clearly states that military Party members and cadres, especially leading cadres, must always maintain a sense of awe and not harbour any illusions of impunity.<sup>46</sup>

### Consequences of the Xi–Zhang Rivalry

With the dismissal of the five members of the CMC, the core decision-making body consists only of Xi Jinping and Zhang Shengmin. This reflects Xi Jinping’s lack of confidence in senior generals, and there are no signs of new appointments to the vacated positions at the CMC. The removal of Zhang Youxia and many subordinates raises doubts about how the command chain of the PLA will function. Most likely, the posts vacated in the PLA will be filled by a group of relatively inexperienced young officers loyal to Xi Jinping.<sup>47</sup> Most of the experienced PLA generals, including Zhang Youxia, Liu Zhenlin, He Weidong and Miao Hua, have fallen.

In this regard, analysts note that the lack of experienced generals like Zhang Youxia, who can provide objective advice, will increase the ‘operational risks’ for Xi Jinping in commanding the million-strong army, especially on the Taiwan issue. Such a scenario may potentially lead to more unstable decision-making or misjudgements.<sup>48</sup> Another view circulating in the public sphere is that the power struggle is not yet settled, and the chain reaction within the military makes Xi Jinping hesitant to act, leaving significant variables and room for compromise in handling the situation. This view argues that this is not merely a personnel change at the top of the Chinese military, but rather the ultimate dismantling of the power structure.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> [“German-language Media: Xi Jinping’s Power Structure](#) (德语媒体：习近平的权力布局)”, *DW*, 3 February 2026.

<sup>48</sup> [“Zhang Youxia’s Downfall: A Shake-up in the Top Ranks of the Chinese Military; How Will Taiwan Face a Dual Challenge During this ‘Window of Opportunity’?”](#) (张又侠落马：中共军方高层震荡, ‘空窗期’内台湾如何面临双重考验?)”, *BBC News*, 6 February 2026.

<sup>49</sup> Li Hui, [“Rumors Circulate that Zhang Youxia was Tortured by Cai Qi! The Secret Detention Location in Gu’an Has Been Exposed; Behind the Deathly Silence Within the Military, Has Xi Jinping Begun to Regret His Actions?”](#) (传张又侠遭蔡奇酷刑! 固安秘密关押地曝光, 全军死寂背后习近平已生悔意? )”, *BBC*, 2 February 2026.

## Conclusion

With the fall of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli, it appears that control now rests with Xi Jinping's faction, as anti-Xi members have been removed from the CMC. The long-standing rivalry among CMC members will affect the PLA's military modernisation goals and has damaged the image and prestige of the Chinese armed forces. Zhang Youxia and He Weitian were the most experienced and tested commanders in military operations. With the fall of Miao Hua and He Weidong, there is no Xi Jinping's confidant in the CMC. Zhang Shengmin, a 'fence sitter' during the power struggle between the two rival factions in the CMC, was appointed CMC Vice Chairman just a few days before ousting Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli. This indicates that Zhang Shengmin is Xi Jinping's new confidant. The delay in appointing the remaining five CMC members indicates that the process is taking longer for reasons that are not yet evident.

## About the Author



**Dr. Abhishek Kumar Darbey** is Associate Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

**Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses** is a non-partisan, autonomous body dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security. Its mission is to promote national and international security through the generation and dissemination of knowledge on defence and security-related issues.

*Disclaimer:* Views expressed in Manohar Parrikar IDSA's publications and on its website are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or the Government of India.

© Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) 2026