

**CHINA'S NEW SUPREME COMMAND AND
POLITICS OF CENTRAL MILITARY
COMMISSION RESHUFFLE**

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Executive Summary

1. The 18th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress has effected generational change of the Central Military Commission (CMC), a once in 10 years exercise at every second national Party congress since 1992. The routine CMC reshuffle constitutes a crucial move of CCP power institutionalization.
2. A generational change (换代) allowed Xi Jinping's intervention and broader CCP elite politics made the formation of the 18th CMC difficult. Although Hu was ultimately responsible for the final personnel line-up, Xi and the departing key members sought a place for their protégés.
3. A major challenge for forming the new CMC was to ensure factional equilibrium. The succession entails a new round of distribution of power and vested interests. It proceeded on the basis of both observing CCP/PLA (People's Liberation Army) norms and patterns of promotion and top elite bargaining between various stakeholders.
4. Specifically this was a negotiation between the second generation generals of PLA elders (2GG 军二代), groupings of two top soldiers: Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, and senior officers with no discernible grouping identities. Both Hu and Xi had their preferred candidates too. The eventual new team reflects key interests of the players.
5. In the new CMC 2GG's share was minimized and the Guo and Xu representation was not excessive. Non-affiliated generals made up half of the membership. Crucially this line-up benefits Xi most.
6. Hu's "naked quit (裸退)" cleared a key barrier for Xi's early power consolidation to tackle strategic challenges. The outcome of Hu's choice has profound impact on not only China's elite politics but also an array of strategic issues related to its political reform, national security, and civil-military ties.

7. The 18th CMC's balanced composition will enable it to run the PLA cohesively in its term. The body composes of fine soldiers with proven ability, reflecting deepening PLA meritocratic trend. It has shown progress in reshaping the top command according to the requirements of joint warfare and war preparation.
8. Currently the top brass registers no major policy difference. The consensus on the national defence strategy is firm, which serves as not only a banner to unite the ranks but also a guide for reform, officer training and promotion, weapons development programs and force restructuring.
9. On the other hand, the 18th CMC faces grave challenges. The top soldier and two CMC members are over 65. This means that it is largely a transitional body. While this is positive to Xi who can reshuffle it according to his own preferences in 2017, the transitional nature affects CMC stability and policy continuity.
10. Under Xi the civil-military relations enter a new page of evolution. His primary power base, the PLA, may be more interventionist on Xi's call, which serves as a key indicator of Xi's political leadership. It is likely that the PLA will increasingly acquire corporate identity and spirit and its progress in modernisation will accelerate.