

**CHINA'S MILITARY LEADERSHIP
AFTER THE 20TH PARTY
CONGRESS**

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Executive Summary

1. The Central Military Commission (CMC) appointed by the 20th Party Congress of 2022 remains quite streamlined, implying that China's President Xi Jinping has transformed it from a collective decision council to a more centralised institution he can leverage to manage and control the People's Liberation Army (PLA).
2. Xi has appointed two uniformed CMC vice chairs whom he can trust to run the PLA. Even though overaged, Zhang Youxia has retained his CMC vice chair position because of close personal ties with Xi. He Weidong was appointed as another uniformed CMC vice chair likely because of his earlier personal association with Xi in Fujian.
3. Both are also appointed because they are professional warriors who have won the respect and trust in the PLA. He Weidong made a career in the PLA Eastern Theatre dedicated to tackling the Taiwan issue, another plausible reason for his ascendance.
4. Military members constitute 20% of the 20th Central Party Committee, which is consistent with the levels of the post-Deng Xiaoping party central committees. The selection criteria for these members may have critical implications for the future development of the PLA.
5. Technological development of the PLA, for instance, will continue to be the top priority of China's military modernisation, particularly in integrating "intelligentised" technologies such as artificial intelligence and unmanned drones. These technologies are likely to optimise further the range, versatility and precision of the PLA's weapons platforms.
6. Enhancing the "jointness" of the PLA operations, particularly at the theatre or operational level, will be a priority. Joint operations may improve the combat effectiveness of the PLA by leveraging the synergy based on integrating the comparative advantages of different services.

7. The appointment of He Weidong as a new uniformed CMC vice chair implies that Taiwan remains the primary strategic direction (主要战略方向) for the PLA.
8. Zhang Youxia's retainment as the other uniformed CMC vice chair position implies that the Western Theatre, a theatre tasked to tackle the issue of border disputes with India, remains a priority, since Zhang made his career in that theatre.
9. The PLA has indeed become more assertive on both fronts (Taiwan and India) in recent years. However, there still appears to be continuity than change in China's military policy and posture, which highlights deterrence and defence through the notion of "active defence".