

Shake-Ups in China's Military Indicate Xi's Power Weakening, Analysts Say

The replacement of executives could be corruption-related and used by CCP factions to pressure Chinese leader Xi Jinping, according to experts.

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Officers of China's military and police arrive for the third plenary session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on March 12, 2019. Kevin Frayer/Getty Images



By Lily Zhou

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News Analysis

The recent changing of senior executives in China's military-industrial complex has fueled speculation that factions within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are vying for influence ahead of the upcoming fourth plenary session and 21st Congress, when party leader Xi could be [forced to resign](#).

In April, three of China's 10 state-owned military enterprises had their CEO or chairman replaced. According to the tally of Chinese financial publication [Caixin](#), since 2024, all state-owned military corporations have been through a similar shake-up.

Before their replacements, three of the executives had been stripped of their statuses as regime political consultants, including Wu Yansheng, chairman and party secretary of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC); Liu Shiquan, chairman and party secretary of Norinco; and Wang Changqing, vice president of the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation Limited (CASIC). They were all [excluded](#) from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in March 2024.

Some had not been seen in public for an extended period of time, including Chen Guoying, former CEO of China South Industries Group Corporation (CSGC); and Yuan Jie, former chairman and party secretary of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation Limited (CASIC). Both were officially replaced in April 2024, but had disappeared for months ahead of the announcement.

Gong Bo, former CEO of CASIC, who was replaced in April, was last seen in public in January. Zeng Yi, former chairman and party secretary of the China Electronics Corporation (CEC), had not attended public events for more than seven months before he was replaced in April, according to [Caixin](#).

Shen Ming-Shih, research fellow at Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research and director of the institute's division of national security research, noted that some of the CCP's top officials, such as former Foreign Minister [Qin Gang](#), had also disappeared from the public eye long before the announcement of their dismissal or arrest.

The CCP used to "Shuanggui" a party official after collecting incriminating evidence, he told The Epoch Times, referring to an internal CCP process where suspects are required to comply with the party's internal investigations before being turned over to the judicial system:

"Only when there was concrete evidence would the individuals be dismissed from the party and their official positions.

“However, we now see more and more individuals dealt with internally. When Qin Gang was arrested and disappeared, the public didn’t know what he allegedly did. We had to wait for a long time for the announcement of his crimes.”

Meanwhile, “were the individuals arrested, poisoned, or have they committed suicide? No one knows,” he added.

Qin, who had previously been China’s ambassador in Washington, vanished from public view for weeks before the official announcement in July 2023 that he was dismissed. His disappearance sparked speculation that he had aroused the ire of CCP authorities for fathering an illegitimate son with a Hong Kong journalist in the United States, but the CCP never announced the reason for his abrupt dismissal.

Former Defense Minister Li Shangfu, was dismissed in October 2023, two months after he disappeared from the public eye. He was expelled from the party in June 2024 and was accused of accepting massive bribes and “severely polluting” the military equipment sector and companies.

Gen. He Weidong, the third-in-command of communist China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA), has also vanished from public view for two months—the regime never commented on rumors of He’s [alleged arrest](#). As of the writing of this article, no report of He can be found on the Ministry of Defense website.

Some of the replaced military executives could be involved in corruption cases, China affairs commentator Wang He, a contributor of the The Epoch Times, said.

Since Xi rose to power, engineers and scientists from China’s military-industrial sector were increasingly promoted. The new military-industrial technocrats “are not clean,” Wang told The Epoch Times.

“The system ... is seriously corrupt, and these people were also politically arrogant,” painting a target on their own back, he said.

“It’s a sign of the CCP’s intensified infighting.”

Shen said some of the replacement of military-industrial technocrats could be an extension of corruption investigations in recent years but it’s also an indication of Xi’s weaning power.

“Because Xi has been losing power, those whom he promoted can be replaced when there’s any evidence of corruption or other offences,”

and they were likely targeted so they can be removed ahead of the fourth plenary session and the 21st Congress, he said.

One of the former military executives, former chairman and party secretary of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), Tan Ruisong, was arrested in February on corruption charges.

Cao Jianguo, who has been quietly removed as chairman and party secretary of the Aero Engine Corporation of China (AECC), was last seen in public in September 2024. It remains unclear why he was replaced. Neither did the regime offer explanations for the replacement of Zhang Zhongyang, former CEO of CASC; or Wen Gang, former chairman and party secretary of the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC).

Shen said the opaque approach of the CCP's investigations mean there are likely people who are wrongfully accused.

If that's the case, "there will likely be increased resistance, creating pressure on Xi. And other factions could unite to force Xi to resign," he said.

Wang said the pervasive corruption in the military-industrial complex could also be used by Xi's detractors as evidence of the CCP leader's failure. He also said that the regime may be covering up the investigations because of the extent of the corruption.

"If the real extent of the corruption was revealed, it would be too shocking, and seriously undermine the morale of the Chinese military," he said.

Yi Ru contributed to this report.

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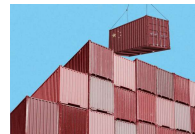
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