

CCP's Anti-Corruption Purge May Hamper Military Modernization Efforts, US Says

Pentagon says current wave of purges touches 'every service' in the CCP military and 'may have shaken Beijing's confidence in high-ranking PLA officials.'

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The Chinese regime's DF-41 nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles during a military parade at Tiananmen Square to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, in Beijing on

By Dorothy Li

12/18/2024

Updated: 12/18/2024

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In its sweeping anti-corruption campaign, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) may have undermined its efforts to modernize the military by 2027, the U.S. Department of Defense said in its latest annual report, released on Dec. 18.

The Pentagon said in the report on CCP military and security developments presented to Congress that the current wave of purges touches “every service” in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and “may have shaken Beijing’s confidence in high-ranking PLA officials,” jeopardizing a top priority for leader Xi Jinping since he took command of the military in 2012.

Xi aims to achieve military modernization by 2035 and transform the PLA into a “world-class force” by 2049, the centennial anniversary of both the PLA’s founding and the establishment of communist China.

However, the Pentagon report stated that in 2023, “the PLA experienced a new wave of corruption-related investigations and removals of senior leaders, which may have disrupted its progress toward stated 2027 modernization goals.”

Between [July](#) and December in 2023, the regime officially fired at least 15 high-ranking military officers and defense industry executives, including several overseeing the equipment development projects related to modernizing the country’s ground-based nuclear and conventional missile capabilities, according to the Pentagon’s report.

One of the most senior officials to fall from grace was former defense minister Li Shangfu, who was [removed](#) from his post in October 2023 following two months of unexplained disappearance.

In June, the CCP expelled Li and his predecessor, accusing them of abusing their powers and accepting massive bribes, state media said at the time.

Before his [promotion](#) to the ministerial position in March 2023, Li headed the Equipment Development Department, a key branch under the Central Military Commission (CMC) responsible for weapons procurement. Over his six-year tenure, Li “would have signed off on all of the PLA’s weapons acquisitions,” the report stated.

In a rare move, the CMC put out a public notice calling for corruption tips in July 2023, initiating investigations into disciplinary violations dating back to October 2017. This initiative, the Pentagon report noted, signaled “significant concerns with the PLA’s modernization efforts more broadly.”

The anti-corruption campaign also ensnared several high-ranking officials commanding the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), which is tasked with managing the country’s conventional and nuclear missiles. Those affected include then-head of PLARF [Li Yuchao](#), political commissar [Xu Zhongbo](#), and several other deputy commanders.

“The impact on PRC leaders’ confidence in the PLA after discovering corruption on this scale is probably elevated by the PLARF’s uniquely important nuclear mission,” the report stated, using the acronym of the regime’s official name, the People’s Republic of China.

The momentum of this campaign shows little sign of waning. On Nov. 28, Adm. [Miao Hua](#), a member of the CMC, the military’s decision-making body, and trusted ally of Xi, was suspended and placed under investigation for suspected “serious violations of discipline,” according to Beijing’s defense ministry, using a euphemism for corruption.

The abrupt shake-up has fueled growing speculation about political infighting within the CCP’s upper echelon. Some analysts have interpreted these developments as a sign that Xi may be facing a [power crisis](#).

Adding to the uncertainty, the situation involving the current defense minister remains unclear. Recent [reports](#) indicated that Adm. Dong Jun, who assumed the ministerial post in December 2023, is also subject to investigation. While the regime’s foreign ministry has

dismissed such claims as “chasing shadows,” analysts said that the emergence of these speculations has already raised questions about Xi’s grip on power.

The Pentagon report pointed out that as of March, Dong was not a member of the CMC, and neither was he named as state councillor—positions previously held by his two predecessors.

A senior U.S. defense official pointed out the ripple effect caused by such an anti-corruption investigation. “[O]nce they uncover corruption in one place or involving one senior official, there’s sort of a bit of a spiraling kind of effect where it inevitably seems to draw in additional officials,” the official [told](#) reporters in a media briefing.

However, it seems unlikely that Beijing will back down from its purge, the official added. “Xi Jinping appears to have made the anti-corruption campaign not only in the PLA, but in the party more broadly, really a hallmark of his tenure as the top leader,” they said.

In a separate [document](#) accompanying the report, the Pentagon described as “uneven” the Chinese military’s progress toward its 2027 capability milestone, a development that, if achieved, could make “the PLA a more credible military tool for the CCP’s Taiwan unification efforts,” the Pentagon stated.

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