



PLA UPDATE

A monthly newsletter focused on the internal and external affairs of the PLA

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Welcome to the January 2024 edition of *PLA UPDATE*, CNA’s newsletter on the internal and external affairs of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA). This issue covers recent high-level PLA promotions and purges, new regulations on military transportation and political education, competitions in English-language proficiency and wargaming, and bilateral and multilateral PLA activities with foreign militaries.

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PLA PROMOTIONS AND DISMISSALS

ADMIRAL DONG JUN BECOMES CHINA'S NEW DEFENSE MINISTER



Xi Jinping and Dong Jun in September 2021, when Dong was promoted to admiral.

Source: CCTV-13.

The PRC Defense Ministry has a new chief following a more than two-month gap. On December 29, 2023, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) appointed Admiral Dong Jun as the 14th minister of national defense for the People's Republic of China (PRC). His appointment filled a position that had been vacant since former defense minister General Li Shangfu's dismissal, which to date has not been officially explained. The official [readout](#) of a late October NPCSC meeting stated that Li was removed from his posts (免职) as state councilor and national defense minister without elaborating on any factor(s) that contributed to this outcome.¹

Defense Minister Dong's appointment is noteworthy because it is the first time that a PLA Navy (PLAN) officer has been named China's defense minister. His prior position was PLAN commander, a role he held from August 2021 until the position was inherited by Admiral Hu Zhongming in late December 2023 (for more on Hu, see below).

In his earlier career, Admiral Dong came up through the ranks as a surface warfare officer. Positions he held prior to his time as PLAN commander include deputy chief of staff at PLAN headquarters (December 2014–2017) and then concurrent commander of the Southern Theater Command Navy and deputy commander of the Southern Theater Command (January 2017–March 2021).²

ADMIRAL HU ZHONGMING PROMOTED TO PLAN COMMANDER

The PLAN's new commanding officer has a background in undersea warfare. On December 25, PRC leader Xi Jinping, acting in his capacity as chairman of China's Central Military Commission (CMC), presided over a ceremony at which Vice Admiral Hu Zhongming was promoted to three-star admiral (the PLA's highest military rank). A Xinhua [readout](#) of the ceremony also revealed that Hu had been appointed as the PLAN's 10th commander.³



Hu is a career submarine officer whose previous positions include the following: assistant to the chief of staff at PLAN Headquarters (December 2014–2016); deputy chief of staff at PLAN Headquarters (December 2016–2019); concurrent commander of the Northern Theater Command Navy and deputy commander of the Northern Theater Command (December 2019–November 2021); and PLAN chief of staff (December 2021–December 2023).⁴

Xi Jinping and Hu Zhongming as Hu is promoted to admiral.

Source: [CCTV-7](#).

NINE PLA GENERALS PURGED IN LATE DECEMBER

The dismissals, based on allegations of corruption, saw more senior Rocket Force leaders removed from their posts. On December 29—the same day that Dong Jun was appointed as China's new minister

of national defense—nine PLA generals were dismissed from China’s 14th National People’s Congress and stripped of their positions, according to Xinhua [reporting](#).⁵ Most of the disgraced officers had connections to the PLA Rocket Force, including five past or current top commanding officers of the force.⁶ No official reason has been given for the purges. Two of the ousted generals—former Rocket Force commander Li Yuchao and his former deputy Zhang Zhenzhong—were placed under anti-corruption investigation earlier this year.⁷

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

NEW REGULATIONS ON MILITARY TRANSPORT AND FORCE PROJECTION

The regulations seek to improve command and control of transport and projection capabilities in a post-reform environment. On January 1, following the approval of Xi Jinping in his capacity as CMC chairman, new regulations on military transport and force projection (军队运输投送条例) went into effect. Although the full text of the regulations was not made public, a *PLA Daily* [report](#) stated that they were created to adapt to China’s new military leadership and command systems, clarify responsibilities and working relations, and regulate operating mechanisms.⁸

A *PLA Daily* [opinion piece](#) on the new regulations argued that the speed and complexity of modern warfare necessitate better integration of transportation and projection tasks into the PLA’s planning and execution of joint operations. The article claimed there was a tendency within the PLA to think about force projection in isolation from operations and warned that such “erroneous thinking” must be abandoned in favor of a more unified approach.⁹

CMC ORDERS PLA TO SUBSCRIBE TO PARTY PERIODICALS IN 2024

CMC Political Work Department issues “Standards for Subscriptions to Newspapers and Periodicals.”

According to a *PLA Daily* [report](#), the new CMC standards, issued in December 2023, mandate that PLA units use designated funds to subscribe to at least three Chinese Communist Party (CCP) official periodicals and read them as part of servicemembers’ routine political education.¹⁰ The required periodicals include:

- *People’s Daily*, the CCP Central Committee’s official newspaper
- *Seeking Truth (Qiushi)*, the CCP Central Committee’s leading theoretic journal published by its Central Party School
- *PLA Daily*, the CMC’s official newspaper

According to the *PLA Daily* article on the new standards, *People’s Daily* and *Seeking Truth* provide “guidance for the CCP and the country from the CCP Central Committee on important ideological and public opinion positions.” Unit party committees at the company level and above must subscribe to and read them. The *PLA Daily*, meanwhile, provides “guidance for the comprehensive construction of the entire army.” All PLA units are expected to subscribe to these—including retirement homes for veterans—and all personnel stationed at home or abroad must read these during regular political work study sessions.

The *PLA Daily* report also notes that personnel should promote the use of new media platforms for these and other official periodicals, including *China National Defense News* and *China Militia* magazines. These two periodicals are described as “important carriers for executing nationwide national defense education.”

Finally, the *PLA Daily* report stated that the CMC Political Work Department and the Discipline Inspection Commission would be monitoring implementation of these standards and that any personnel or units found to be violating them would be “punished accordingly.”

PLA COMPETITIONS

FIRST PLA-WIDE ENGLISH COMPETITION HELD FOR NCO STUDENTS

The contest was reportedly part of efforts to better equip non-commissioned officers (NCOs) for the PLA's future interactions with foreign militaries. On December 28, *PLA Daily* reported that the first "'Bayi Cup' Military Academic Institution NCO Student English Ability Competition" recently concluded at the PLA Naval NCO School in eastern China's Anhui Province. The competition included over 70 participants from 14 PLA academic institutions. Participants demonstrated their English-language reading, listening, and speaking skills in challenges focused on topics such as military science and technology, weapons and equipment, and combined military exercises. According to an individual from China's Military Academic Institution English Education Association (军队院校英语教学联席会), the competition was an important part of the PLA's efforts to cultivate "new-type NCO talent" with strong on-the-job English-language ability and internationally focused professional credentials.¹¹

PRC HOLDS 7TH NATIONAL WARGAMING COMPETITION

Military and civilian participants squared off in computerized contests focused on joint operations and aerial combat.

From December 6 to 9, the finals of China's 7th National Wargaming Competition were held in Taiyuan, the capital of northern China's Shanxi Province, according to a [report](#) from the Chinese Institute of Command and Control, the competition's lead organizer. Over 700 wargaming experts, leaders, and participants from nearly 100 domestic military and civilian academic institutions, research centers, and technology companies attended the finals. The main contest at the event was a "human-against-human confrontation" supported by a platform developed by the Beijing-based technology company Huashu Defense. The finals also featured contests focused on joint operations man-machine coordination and intelligent air combat that were supported by platforms and technicians from the PLA National University of Defense Technology and Nankai University, respectively.¹²



Air combat platform developed by Nankai University.

Source: [CCTV-7](#).



Left: Site of the finals. Right: Winners of the main contest from the PLA Army Academy of Artillery and Air Defense.

Source: [Chinese Institute of Command and Control](#).

MILITARY DIPLOMACY & OVERSEAS ACTIVITIES

PLA HOSTS CONFERENCES ON MEDICINE, HADR, COUNTERTERRORISM

Military, police, and government personnel from at least 20 countries attended PLA-hosted events in three PRC cities. In December, the PLA convened several multilateral conferences with foreign militaries from Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) and the Middle East. These events included the following:

- **First China-LAC Military Medicine Forum.** This forum, which concluded on December 12 in Beijing, was attended by leaders and medical experts from 17 LAC countries' military or police medical departments, according to [PLA Daily reporting](#). Participants from countries including Ecuador, Brazil, and Trinidad and Tobago discussed such topics as smart health service administration, systems and technologies for treating combat trauma, and the prevention and control of novel and emerging infectious diseases.¹³



Opening ceremony of the China-LAC Military Medicine Forum.

Source: [CCTV-7](#).

- **China-LAC Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Seminar.** On December 14, a PRC Defense Ministry spokesperson [announced](#) that the PLA Army Command College would host this seminar from December 14 to 20 in Nanjing, the capital of eastern China's Jiangsu Province. Countries invited to attend the seminar included Uruguay, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Bolivia.¹⁴
- **China-Arab States Special Operations and Counterterrorism Seminar.** From December 26 to 30, the PLA Southern Theater Command hosted this seminar in Guangzhou, the capital of southern China's Guangdong Province, according to a [statement](#) from a PRC Defense Ministry spokesperson. Participants included commanders of special operations and counterterrorism departments from countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. Topics of discussion included combined responses to new trends in regional terrorism, urban special operations, and counter-piracy.¹⁵

MND HIGHLIGHTS ADVANCES IN PRC MILITARY DIPLOMACY IN 2023

PLA operations and activities were portrayed as supporting broader efforts to consolidate relations with foreign countries, defend PRC interests, and promote a China-led security architecture. At a [press conference](#) held on December 28, 2023, a spokesperson of the PRC Ministry of National Defense asserted that China's military diplomacy had achieved "high-quality development" in 2023 as China's armed forces implemented Xi Jinping's thought on military strengthening and foreign affairs.¹⁶ The spokesperson gave examples of five areas in which PRC military diplomacy made advances over the past year, as follows:

- **Complementing broader political and diplomatic objectives.** The spokesperson stated that CMC leaders engaged in strategic communication with defense and military leaders from countries including Russia, the US, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan, and South Africa to advance strategic cooperation in accordance with Xi Jinping's foreign policy strategy.
- **Supporting the defense of national sovereignty, security, and development interests.** The spokesperson said that in response to unspecified foreign countries' criticisms and "provocations"

related to the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, China's armed forces carried out timely diplomatic representations to complement military operations and activities.

- **Developing relationships with foreign militaries.** According to the spokesperson, the PLA carried out 34 bilateral or trilateral exercises, training activities, and competitions in 2023 to deepen mutual trust and cooperation with relevant countries' militaries. Examples named by the spokesperson included bilateral PLA exercises with Russia (Northern Interaction and Peace Friendship), Cambodia (Golden Dragon), and Laos (Friendship Shield).¹⁷
- **Promoting Beijing's preferred approaches to regional and global security issues.** The spokesperson stated that China organized its own multilateral security fora—such as the Xiangshan Forum—to forge a new paradigm for international security cooperation, even as China attended fora organized by other countries, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue, to promote major concepts such as the Global Security Initiative.
- **Providing public goods to the international community.** The spokesperson identified several types of PLA overseas activities as examples of China providing "public security goods" to foreign countries, including the following: a PLAN hospital ship's humanitarian mission to five Pacific Island countries, People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) Y-20 deliveries of emergency supplies following earthquakes in Afghanistan and Nepal, and the PLAN's evacuation of PRC and foreign nationals from conflict-ridden Sudan.¹⁸

Of note, the PRC Defense Ministry spokesperson's remarks were delivered on the same day as the conclusion of China's two-day Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference. This national-level conference identified a series of achievements in China's diplomatic activities under the leadership of Xi Jinping and laid out plans for military and civilian organizations' future foreign-related initiatives, according to a Xinhua [readout](#) of the event.¹⁹

NOTES

¹ "(Authoritative Release) Order of the President of the People's Republic of China (No. 14)" ((受权发布) 中华人民共和国主席令 (第十四号)), Xinhua (新华网), Oct. 24, 2023, http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/2023-10/24/c_1129935718.htm.

² Andrew S. Erickson and Christopher H. Sharman, "Admiral Dong Jun Engages Friends and Foes: China's First Naval Defense Minister Brings Joint Operational Experience," CMSI Note 2 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute), Dec. 30, 2023, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/2/>.

³ "Xi Presents Order to Promote Military Officers to Rank of General," Xinhua, Dec. 25, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20231225/09c5d40d7ca6416a99ca50993632ae35/c.html>.

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⁵ "(Authoritative Release) Announcement No. 2 of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress [14th Session]" ((受权发布) 全国人民代表大会常务委员会公告 (十四届) 第二号), Xinhua (新华网), Dec. 29, 2023, <http://www.news.cn/politics/20231229/008dddc4119c42c48e7046cf1ca191bc/c.html>.

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⁸ “Central Military Commission Chairman Xi Jinping Signs Order to Publish ‘Military Transport and Force Projection Regulations’” (中央军委主席习近平签署命令发布《军队运输投送条例》), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Dec. 28, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-12-29&paperNumber=01&articleid=922430.

⁹ Xu Xingqi (徐兴奇), "Joint Operations Call for Joint Projection" (联合作战呼唤联合投送), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Jan. 25, 2024, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2024-01-25&paperNumber=04&articleid=924184.

¹⁰ Xue Tao and Cheng Wenjun, “The Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission Issues Notice Requiring Subscriptions in 2025 to Party Newspapers and Journals” (中央军委政治工作部通知要求做好 2024 年度党报党刊订阅工作), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Dec. 21, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-12-21&paperNumber=01&articleid=921915.

¹¹ Cai Wenjuan (蔡文娟) and Ni Shuai (倪帅), "First 'Bayi Cup' Military Academic Institution NCO Student English Ability Competition Concludes" (首届“八一杯”军队院校军士学员英语能力比赛落幕), *PLA Daily* (军事报道), Dec. 28, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-12-28&paperNumber=05&articleid=922380.

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¹³ Wang Di (王迪) and Li Shurui (李姝睿), “First China-LAC Military Medicine Forum Concludes” (首届中国-拉美和加勒比军事医学论坛闭幕), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Dec. 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-12-15&paperNumber=02&articleid=921538; “First China-LAC Military Medicine Forum Concludes” (首届中国-拉美和加勒比军事医学论坛闭幕), *Military Report* (军事报道), CCTV-7, Dec. 15, 2023, <https://tv.cctv.com/2023/12/15/VIDEbwmdkQfT5bZ4BseGzXZ9231215.shtml?spm=C52346.PiumOrYLNUM.E0VXtwLj8YU7.81>.

¹⁴ “PLA Army Command College Hosts Seminar on HADR for LAC Countries: Defense Spokesperson,” China Military Online, Dec. 14, 2023, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16273492.html.

¹⁵ “China, Arab Countries Hold Special Operations and Counter-Terrorism Seminar: Defense Spokesperson,” China Military Online, Dec. 28, 2023, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16276757.html.

¹⁶ “Regular Press Conference of China's Ministry of National Defense on November 30” (2023 年 12 月国防部例行记者会文字实录), Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国国防部), Dec. 28, 2023, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/xwfy/lxjzhzt/2023njzh/2023n12y/16277185.html>.

¹⁷ See past issues of *PLA UPDATE* for summaries of exercises Northern Interaction (Issue 13), Golden Dragon (Issue 9), and Friendship Shield (Issue 11).

¹⁸ “Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Held in Beijing,” Xinhua, Dec. 28, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20231228/903c6a4b54334e66967d968b1495277c/c.html>.

¹⁹ See past issues of *PLA UPDATE* for summaries of the PLAN *Peace Ark's* humanitarian mission to five Pacific Island countries (Issues 13 and 14), PLAAF Y-20 deliveries of emergency supplies to Afghanistan and Nepal (Issue 16), and the PLAN's evacuation of PRC and foreign citizens from Sudan (Issue 10).

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