



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# What is behind Xi's announcement of new purges at the top of the Chinese army?



China's military establishment has ample reason to fear a continuation of the purges, as head of state Xi Jinping has once again reminded them that he will remain faithful to this method of consolidating his personal influence.

Xi symbolically chose Yan'an, the "sacred place" of the Chinese revolution, as the stage for his renewed **warning** to the military leadership that he would get to the root of corruption. That is the place where, in the 1930s, Mao Zedong resurrected the decimated Red Army after the Long March.

And to add emphasis to the symbolism, which contains a sharp warning, Xi and the Communist Party leadership chose the form of the so-called military-political work conference, which last met 10 years ago.

"There is no place for corrupt elements in the military," Xi Jinping told members of the Central Military Commission, the body that regulates defence, and top army officers.

The stage is set for a new wave of purges. It would come as no surprise if news of arrests or changes in the leadership of the People's Liberation Army were to emerge from Beijing in the coming weeks.

## A gift for the forthcoming meeting of the CCP Central Committee

This would be an important demonstration of power by the Chinese Communist Party in the run-up to the third plenary session of the CCP Central Committee, which is scheduled for mid-July.

In the run-up to this important meeting of the party leadership, at which Xi Jinping will present China's economic and reform priorities for the coming years, the "hunt" in the form of the removal of the corrupt from the top echelons of the army would be in the function of promoting new state goals.

It is difficult to understand the extent of corruption in the Chinese army and defence system. This can only be achieved indirectly through occasional purges and the rhetoric of the state and party leadership, which sees corruption as one of the biggest systemic problems.

**During Xi's 12-year rule, his motto was that crushing corruption was a permanent state for the CCP**

"Battling corruption is the most thorough form of self-revolution. As long as the soil and conditions conducive for corruption continue to exist, the fight against corruption can't cease for a moment," Xi said two years ago, shortly before he was due to take up a third term in office at the CCP October Congress.

During his 12-year rule, his motto was that crushing corruption was a permanent state for the CCP. He repeated it in the historical setting of Yan'an and said that everything should return to the roots of communism in China and to his motto of revolution as a permanent state.

## Purges - a permanent state

The purges in the military leadership are an essential part of this permanence, which will undoubtedly continue after a shocking last year when a dozen high-ranking officers "disappeared," including the defence minister.

It remains unknown what has happened to Li Shangfu, who disappeared from office last September and was **replaced** in December by the current defence minister, Admiral Dong Yun, a former navy commander.

It was the fifth change of defence minister during Xi Jinping's tenure, and it followed the dismissal and arrest of a dozen high-ranking military officers, including generals, strategic missile force commanders, former air force commanders and admirals, and naval forces commanders in the South China Sea.

## In Xi's governing model, strengthening the army and defence system is even more important than economic development

Xi's fight against corruption, particularly at the top of the army, is a crucial component of his strong-arm model of rule on which he bases the strength of his authority.

In his governing model, strengthening the army and defence system is even more important than economic development. In March, Premier Li Qiang **presented** the national economic strategy to parliament, which clearly prioritised strengthening the security system rather than economic development.

The 8.6% growth in the cost of central government administration and the 7.2% growth in the military budget clearly illustrate the priority given to security and the state apparatus over the economy, given that both projected cost increases are higher than GDP growth of around 5%.

## The danger of repeating the Russian experience with corruption in the army

Apart from the fact that the proclaimed fight against corruption in the state and military leadership serves as a powerful tool for Xi and his apparatus to maintain their influence in the establishment, the announcement of new purges in the army is also a result of highly practical calculations.

The suppression of the apparently widespread corruption in the Chinese army is a direct consequence of the Russian experience with aggression against Ukraine.



*Xi's appearance before the military establishment was a direct announcement of a new wave of purges*

The invasion of Ukraine revealed the extent of looting and corruption in the Russian army, and, above all, that long-tolerated corruption directly influences the war objectives.

“As a result, bribe money intended to buy a Ukrainian coup was stolen before it could leave Russian hands, soldiers on the front line were provided with ration packs seven years out of date, crowdsourcing for body armour was required for troops not properly equipped for the war, fuel was sold on the black market before it could power Russian tanks and supply chains failed. Ultimately as a result of this all – Russian morale suffered,” is the **conclusion** of an earlier analysis by Transparency International.

China does not want to have a negative Russian experience if it initiates a major military action itself.

Therefore, Xi's appearance before the military establishment, at the "mythical" site of the Chinese revolution, was not only an open threat of retaliation against corrupt officers from the top of the army and leaders of the military industry.

It was also a direct announcement of a new wave of purges, intended by the leader to energise loyalty as the supreme value of belonging to the Chinese state and military leadership.