



Xi Jinping -- China's president, the party's general secretary and the military's top supervisor -- appears to be getting some pushback from certain quarters within the military. (Nikkei montage/Source photos by Reuters and Yusuke Hinata)

CHINA UP CLOSE

Analysis: China military in disarray over Xi's monopoly on power

83rd Group Army's advocacy for 'collective leadership' defies the supreme leader

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The People's Liberation Army, the powerful military of the Chinese Communist Party, is in political disarray amid a feud over Xi Jinping's handling of the country's leadership system.

The feud surfaced at the beginning of this month, with the politically potent PLA being pulled into a series of unusual episodes.

On Dec. 1, the Central Theater Command of the PLA posted an article on its official social media account announcing a study session held by the 83rd Group Army, which belongs to the command.

The CTC's article was accompanied by a photo of a 16-character political slogan hanging on a wall, the lettering and frame in gold. The 83rd Group Army was advocating for what the slogan stands for at its study session.

The slogan is made up of four tenets -- *ji ti ling dao* (collective leadership), *min zhu ji zhong* (democratic centralism), *ge bie yun niang* (individual consultations) and *hui yi jue ding* (decision by meetings).



The study session was held in front of a framed slogan that essentially boils down to this: Decision-making power should be shared and not concentrated in the hands of a few. (Photo from the official social media of the Central Theater Command).

It means democratic centralism must be implemented thoroughly under the collective leadership system, important issues must be discussed individually and properly, and decisions must be made at meetings.

At first glance, there might seem to be no problem. But in today's China, the slogan comes off as highly defiant. More significantly, this act of defiance came from within the military.

The 83rd Group Army's public advocacy for the tenets came despite General Secretary and President Xi having significantly concentrated power in his own hands since taking charge of the party in 2012.

Furthermore, the CTC's article did not refer to Xi at all. Neither did it mention political terms intended to ensure his concentration of power, such as "centralized, unified leadership," the "Two Establishes" and the "Two Upholds."

The sixth plenary session of the party's 18th Central Committee in 2016 positioned Xi as the "core" of the party. The centralized, unified leadership of the party's Central Committee with Xi as its core has since been emphasized in China.

The "Two Establishes" refers to the establishment of Xi's status as the core of the party and the establishment of the guiding position of his eponymous ideology. The term "Two Upholds" means safeguarding Xi's status as the core of the party and safeguarding the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the Central Committee.

The study session was called to look at the themes that were discussed during the Political Work Conference of the Central Military Commission, held earlier in the year. Xi chairs the CMC, the top military organ that supervises the PLA.

Word of the 83rd Group Army's study session quickly reverberated across the country after it received extensive coverage in "The Paper" online news outlet and other media.

The study session focused on the Political Work Conference of the Central Military Commission that took place in Yan'an, an old revolutionary base in Shaanxi province, on June 17-19, according to the CTC's announcement.



President Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the Political Work Conference of the Central Military Commission of China in Yan'an, Shaanxi province. (Photo by Xinhua/Kyodo)

Xi himself attended the conference. Basic policies on the military's leadership system and other political matters should have been discussed there. Other topics likely included ideologies and personnel affairs.

The CMC conference was held before both the third plenum of the party's current 20th Central Committee in July and the Beidaihe meeting, a conclave of party heavyweights held each summer.

It would be strange if themes like collective leadership, democratic centralism, individual consultations and decision-making through meetings -- all of which the 83rd Group Army, stationed in Henan province, advocated in its social media post -- had not been discussed at the CMC conference in June.

According to an announcement issued after that conference, Xi pointed out that "China's military is confronted with complicated challenges in the political work." The announcement also declared somewhat abruptly that "democratic centralism" would be strictly realized.

But Xi also stressed the responsibility of party committees' secretaries. Regarding "democratic centralism," he was apparently at pains to put more emphasis on "centralization" than on "democracy."

In China, the party leads everything, and committees are party cells set up within various organizations. Secretaries are the top officials of the organizations politically.

On the other hand, the term "centralized, unified leadership" was missing from the announcement made in June about the CMC conference. Instead, the announcement referred to "unified leadership."

There is a possibility that collective leadership, democratic centralism and intraparty democracy became the CMC conference's hidden, and controversial, themes and that these topics have kept reverberating through the military.

In June, [Miao Hua -- said to be Xi's "agent within the military"](#) -- was serving as head of the CMC's Political Work Department. Miao is one of the CMC's only six members.

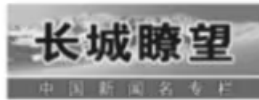
Five months later, in late November, a spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense announced that Miao had been suspended from office for "suspected serious violations of discipline." His punishment is likely to be related to developments since the CMC conference.

On Dec. 9, eight days after the CTC's article about the study meeting was posted on social media, the PLA Daily, the mouthpiece of the CMC, published an official commentary titled, "Take the lead in adhering to collective leadership."

带头坚持集体领导

——自觉做坚持民主集中制的表率②

■邵天江



集体领导是民主集中制“十六字”原则的核心和本质，是党的领导的最高原则之一，是科学决策、民主决策的重要保证。这一重要原则，是我们党的传统，必须坚决贯彻，长期坚持。

邓小平同志在党的八大上所作的《关于修改党的章程的报告》中说：“在我们党内，从长期以来，由党的集体而不由个人决定重大的问题，已经形成一个传统。”党是一个集体，是有组织的。党的领导是党委集体的领导，而不是一个、两个人的领导。这就是说，在各组党组织领导班子内部，不管是谁，都要坚持集体领导，重大问题的决策一定要由集体讨论决定，个人不能凌驾于领导集体之上。

“集体，到历史中去，集体，到历史中去”

少和避免工作中的偏差和失误，最大限度地保证党委决策正确性；同时，又能使班子成员积极履行职务，充分发挥主观能动性和创造性。我们党之所以能够战胜一切强大敌人，克服一切艰难险阻，一个根本原因就在于始终坚持集体领导统一思想、统一意志、统一行动，把党委集体凝聚成坚强的领导核心。

毛泽东同志指出：“书记和委员之间的关系是少数服从多数，这同班长和战士之间的关系是不一样的。”这个不一样之处，就在于“书记和委员不是上下级关系，书记是党的委员会中平等的一员”。然而，在一些党委内部，重要问题的解决，不是由党委会会议作决定，而是由个人作决定，党委委员等于虚设。个别主要领导干部中之名曰“一言堂”、“家长制”，在开会时“个人定调”，在讨论中“个人定音”，在形成决议时“个人定局”，使得名为集体领导，实际上个人或少数人说了算。

“在中国人民解放军里面，长期以来就实行着党委的集体领导制，或者说领导集体，由集体决策下的命令命令”

的是部队各级领导权和指挥权由党集体掌握和确保政令军令畅通的问题，体现了我军的鲜明特色和根本优势。战事日紧，战局愈紧。从革命战争年代，到和平建设时期，这一制度都展现出强大的生命力、凝聚力和战斗力，“证明这个制度对于部队工作是有利的”。

习主席在中央军委党的建设会议上强调，要落实党委统一的集体领导下的首长分工负责制，做到一切工作都置于党委统一领导之下，一切重要问题都由党委研究决定。随着国防和军队现代化建设的加速推进，军事系统运行日益复杂，军队使命任务不断拓展，各集团军决策的范围越来越广，难度越来越大，标准越来越高。这种形势下，更加需要党委班子成员提高政治站位，带头坚持集体领导，注重发扬民主，以更好保证决策的科学性、全面性、准确性。

“遇事虚心一议，与人和气”“一个班子的书记、副书记在党建设和领导工作中是‘领头雁’，起着关键作用，负有全面责任。只有善于运用民主的方法科学决策，集体决策，才能”

对军而不偏用，才能形成“委员敢于直言，书记善于纳谏”的民主氛围，最大限度地凝聚一班人的智慧和力量。

“集体领导和个人负责，二者不可偏废。”党的领导是集体的，各项工作则是具体的。集体领导是党委领导的最高原则，首长分工负责制是党委决策的执行机制。两者相辅相成，相互促进，相得益彰。集体决定了的事，班子成员要分头去办；各负其责，决不允许合意的执行，不合意的不执行，决不允许游移态度、敷衍推诿。

“和衷共济，在于分兵；上下之联，在于聚力。”团结出凝聚力，出战斗力，出战斗力。集体领导的权威靠“一班人”共同维护。凡是团结坚强、关系顺畅的领导班子，都有一条根本经验，就是集体领导执行得好；凡是内耗丛生、涣散软弱的领导班子，也都有一条根本教训，就是民主集中制不健全。每个班子成员都要自觉维护班子团结和领导集体权威，相互支持、相互配合、相互监督，人人担担子、分工不分家，真正做到集体领导下的团结一致、团结一致”

The PLA Daily calls for political power to be shared more collectively, making its case by including comments delivered by Deng Xiaoping in the 1950s.

The commentary starts by daring to cite Deng Xiaoping and remarks he made about collective leadership in the second half of the 1950s, during Mao Zedong's era.

Deng was quoted as saying that key party decisions had traditionally been made collectively, not by individuals, that the party's leadership was exercised collectively by party committees, not by one or two people, and that key party decisions must be made through group discussions.

The commentary "resists and criticizes the excessive concentration of power [in Xi's hands], which is currently conspicuous," one researcher of Chinese politics said.

The commentary also cites remarks once made by Mao, the founding father of the People's Republic of China, criticizing leaders for making decisions at their discretion in the name of "centralization" in defiance of collective leadership.

The commentary was written by an officer serving in a military unit in Henan province.

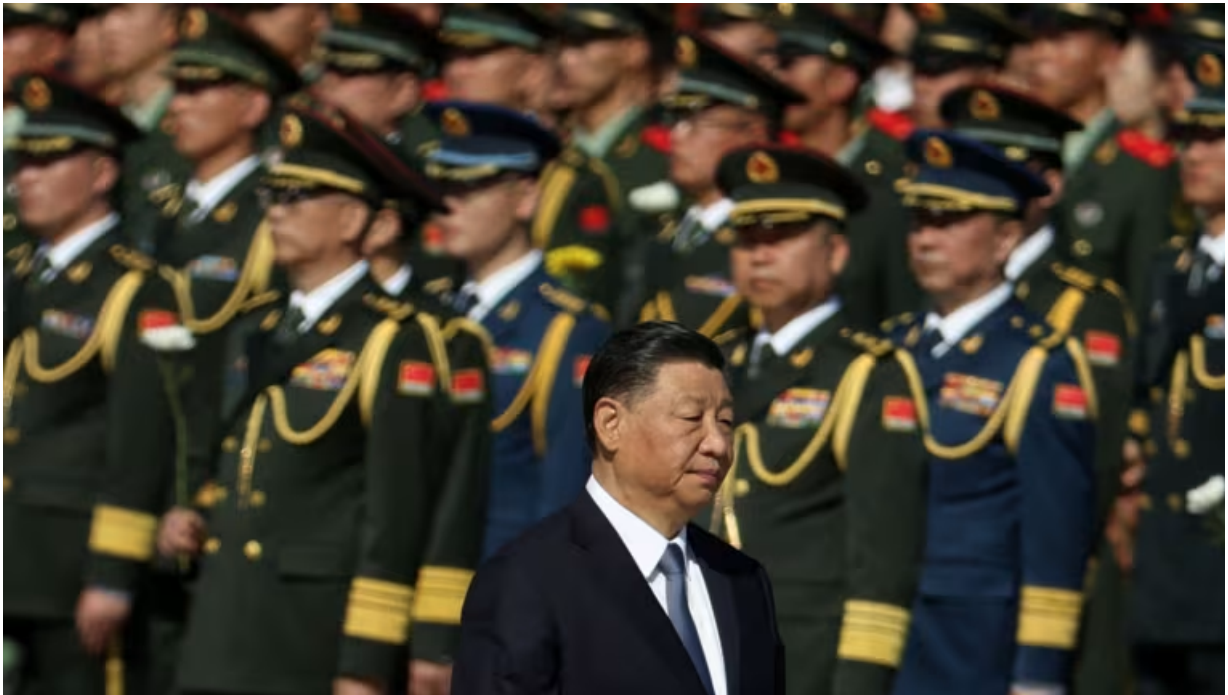
Two days later, on Dec. 11, the PLA Daily published another commentary, "Take the lead in promoting intraparty democracy." This one was authored by a military officer at the CMC's Office for Reform and Organizational Structure.

Democracy comes before centralization in democratic centralism, and secretaries and rank-and-file committee members are in an equal relationship within party organizations, having equal say and voting rights when discussing and making decisions, the op-ed says.

It also says that secretaries are merely group heads and that they must never make themselves masters of houses or rearrange their relationship with rank-and-file committee members into a hierarchy. Remember that sitting at the top of many secretaries is General Secretary Xi.

Before the Xi era began in 2012, Hu Angang, a prominent Chinese economist and professor at Tsinghua University, stressed the superiority of collective leadership, China's unique political system. He did this in an article in the People's Daily, the party's mouthpiece.

At the time, Hu pointed out the problems of presidential systems like those in the U.S. and elsewhere that concentrate power in the hands of a national leader.



China's economy has been giving Xi fits for years. Now the military is creating some headwinds for the Chinese president. © Reuters

But after the Xi era began, the concentration of power in the hands of one quickly materialized. Along the way, Hu's argument became a politically dangerous theory, one that is perilous to bring up in public.

Except, it seems, within the military, at least part of which is now openly advocating for collective leadership and intraparty democracy.

It's not that all articles in the PLA Daily champion these tenets. In fact, an article that indicates a preference for the concentration of power in Xi's hands was published in the paper around the same time. Another group army that belongs to the CTC -- which is responsible for the defense of central Chinese areas, including Beijing -- was featured in that article.

At present, the Chinese military's disarray appears to be limited to political thought and ideologies. But it remains to be seen whether the feud over the country's leadership system and other issues will affect military operations.

Is there also a possibility that the Chinese military's political disarray will spill over into other institutions? This is a question that could be answered next year.

