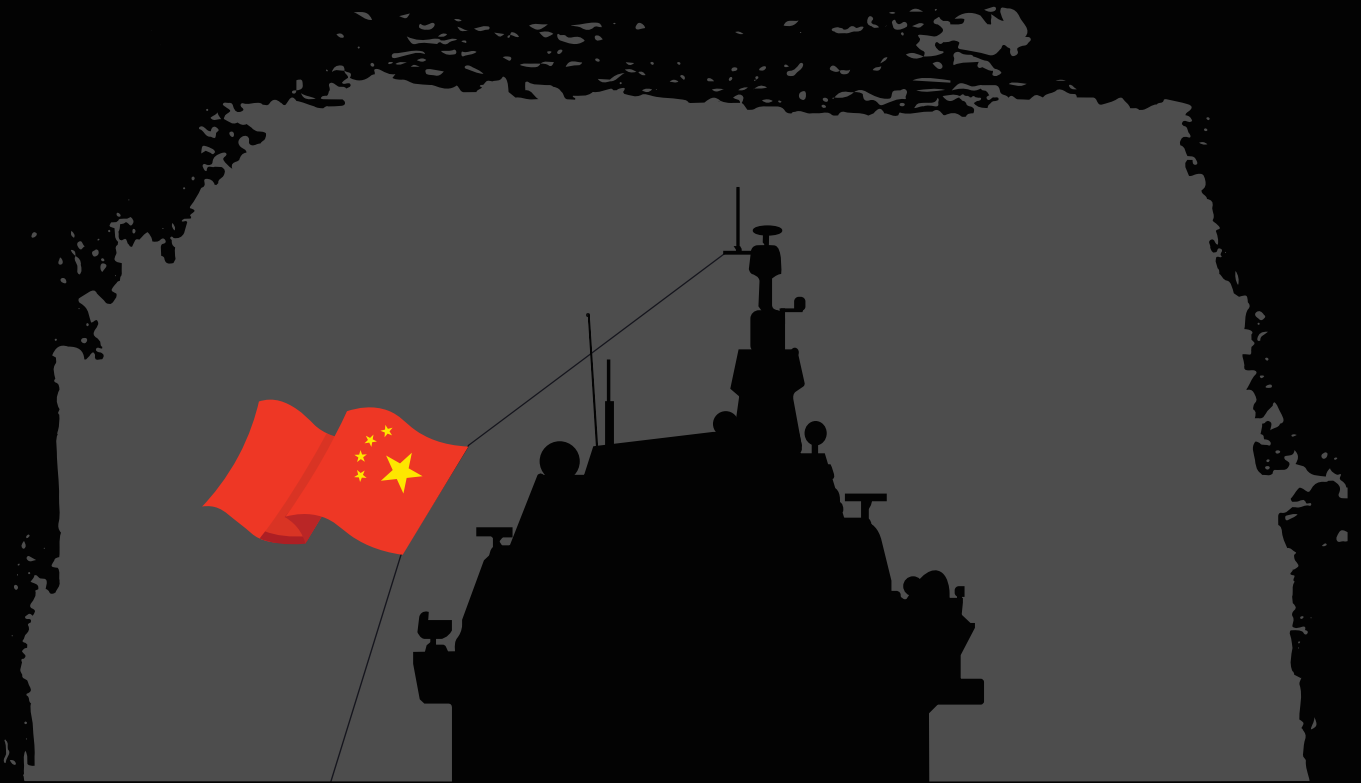




中国海事研究所
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NOTES: 15



PLAN Chief of Staff VADM Li Hanjun:
Fast-Rising Star of Training and Education Extinguished



CHINA MARITIME STUDIES INSTITUTE
CENTER FOR NAVAL WARFARE STUDIES
U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
686 CUSHING ROAD (3C)
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND 02841



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PLAN Chief of Staff VADM Li Hanjun: Fast-Rising Star of Training and Education Extinguished

Andrew S. Erickson and Christopher H. Sharman¹

On 27 June 2025, the Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Vice Admiral (VADM/海军中将) Li Hanjun (李汉军), was dismissed from his position as a deputy to China's 14th National People's Congress (NPC) by the Navy Servicemen's Congress.² The sixty-year-old Li had been serving as PLAN Chief of Staff (海军参谋长) for slightly over a year, since April 2024.³

Similarly removed from the NPC was nuclear scientist Liu Shipeng, who was a deputy chief engineer at state-owned China National Nuclear Corporation.⁴ In a long-anticipated move, the NPC Standing Committee simultaneously announced that it had voted to remove Admiral Miao Hua as the Director of the Central Military Commission (CMC)'s Political Work Department, where he had overseen promotions across the People's Liberation Army (PLA).⁵ These developments indicate that the trio is being subject to serious internal disciplinary measures, designed to address “corruption” as interpreted by Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping and prevalent throughout his thirteen years as paramount leader—namely, defined as threatening his command of the PLA, and possibly the ambitious missions he has assigned it.⁶ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaves nothing to chance with such disciplinary measures; the termination of their official careers is a foregone conclusion.

¹ Dr. Erickson is Professor of Strategy at CMSI. CAPT (Ret.) Sharman is Director of CMSI. This Note does not necessarily represent the views, policies, or positions of the U.S. Department of Defense or its components, to include the Department of the Navy or the U.S. Naval War College. The views expressed here, based solely on open sources, are the authors' alone, as well as any errors; they made every effort to double-check data during the less than seventy-two hours between the announcement of Vice Admiral Li's dismissal and this note's publication. The authors thank Ken Allen, Ryan Martinson, and TextOre for invaluable inputs. The authors welcome suggestions for improvement via www.andrewerickson.com/contact.

² 全国人民代表大会常务委员会 [Standing Committee of the National People's Congress], 授权发布 | 全国人民代表大会常务委员会公告 (十四届) 第十一号 [Authorized Release | Announcement of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (14th Session) No. 11], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], 27 June 2025, <http://www.news.cn/20250627/fel5ca91e1ea4fa9a163f4e9e7cb8291/c.html>.

³ The PLAN Chief of Staff is part of the PLAN's top leadership, but not at the very top. Issues of People's Navy that report on a PLAN leadership meeting indicate the following protocol order: the Chief of Staff comes after the Commander, Political Commissar, Deputy Commanders, 1-2 Deputy Political Commissars, and the Secretary of the Discipline Inspection Committee.

⁴ SCMP Reporter, “Chinese Navy Chief of Staff and Nuclear Scientist Expelled from Top Legislature,” *South China Morning Post*, 27 June 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3316110/chinese-navy-chief-staff-and-nuclear-scientist-expelled-top-legislature>.

⁵ Andrew S. Erickson and Christopher H. Sharman, “Admiral Miao Hua's Fall: Further Navy Fallout?” *CMSI Note* 11 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 28 November 2024), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/11/>.

⁶ Regarding comparative definitions of “corruption,” see Andrew S. Erickson, “Admiral Wang Renhua: Exemplifying Jointness and Oversight for China's Navy amid Xi's Grade-and-Rank Reforms,” *CMSI Note* 5 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 11 April 2024), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/5/>.

Key findings:

VADM Li Hanjun was a fast-rising star, terminated before he could make his full contribution and career achievements:

- VADM Li's senior roles, including at the Dalian Naval Academy and as Commandant of the Naval Command College, suggest he was well known and respected across the fleet.
- Li has influenced a generation of current PLAN operational leaders. His relentless advocacy of high-intensity training in both service-specific and joint roles suggest he had outsized influence in shaping the trajectory of current PLAN training.
- The reasons for Vice Admiral Li's removal remain opaque, but likely related to the downfall of Admiral Miao Hua, who would have been involved in Li's selection and promotions through the flag ranks.
- VADM Li Hanjun's defenestration comes just months after another leader with tremendous operational experience—VADM Li Pengcheng—was similarly removed as Deputy Commander of the Southern Theater Command, but their respective purges do not appear to have slowed the pace and scope of PLAN training around Taiwan, in the South China Sea, or in the Western Pacific.
- The removal of VADM Li Hanjun would suggest that Xi believes he can burn through a tremendous amount of talent to make the PLA into the force he envisions. If Xi continues to feel he can afford this price, then we must seriously consider the possibility that a degree of military leadership churn is “priced in” to his approach to building the world class forces he seeks.

Stellar Career: Leadership in Surface Warfare, Training, Education, Bureaucracy

Li Hanjun was born in October 1965 near East Sea Fleet Headquarters, in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City, Zhejiang Province.⁷ With a strong academic record, he was admitted to Zhoushan Middle School in 1980. In July 1982, Li graduated and was admitted later that year to the Dalian Naval Academy, which focuses on surface warfare. He entered at the age of 18 in 1983. As a second-year student in 1984, Li participated in the naval cadet formation within China's 35th National Day Parade.⁸

Li's long, successful naval career began with service in fleet units, rapidly building operational experience as a fast-track surface warfare officer and leader aboard various warships in what is now the Eastern Theater Command Navy (ETCN).⁹ From 2000–02, Senior Captain (SCAPT/海军大校) Li was a Deputy Chief of Staff of the 6th Destroyer Zhidui [Division] (East Sea Fleet Unit 91991 in Zhoushan,

⁷ “China Displays Its Most Advanced Weapons in National Day Parade,” Xinhua, 1 October 2009, news.xinhuanet.com/English/2009-10/01/content_12146079.htm; republished in *Global Times*, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/474047.shtml>.

⁸ 本报记者 钱晓虎 [Our Reporter Qian Xiaohu], “力量与智慧的交响 科学与技术的协奏 阅兵村里的‘科技元素’” [A Symphony of Strength and Wisdom, A Concert of Science and Technology: The “Elements of Science and Technology” in the Parade Village], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 13 September 2009, 2; “海军学员方队李汉军: 培养舰长不容易(图)” [Navy Cadet Formation Leader Li Hanjun: Cultivating Captains is Not Easy], Xinhua, 1 October 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2009-10/01/content_12136600.htm; 5 October 2009, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-10-05/1304569209.html>.

⁹ This paragraph draws in part on Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* CRM-2013-U-006467-Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA Corporation, December 2013), 156, https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/crm-2013-u-006467-final.pdf.

Zhejiang Province). Also in 2002, SCAPT Li studied abroad at the Kuznetsov Naval Academy in Russia, where his classmates included American and British officers.¹⁰ From early 2002 to 2005, Li was Chief of Staff of the 6th Destroyer Zhidui. Hailed as a promising young officer with a talent for understanding new technology, in 2002 Li was one of three outstanding young ship captains recognized by name who were then assuming a command post in a combat formation.¹¹ Meanwhile, from Fall 2003 to July 2005, in what was apparently his capstone educational achievement, Li was part of “the first class/cohort of the graduate program for early and mid-career officers at the National Defense University” (国防大学首期中青班研究生).¹²

While a student in the program, Li was invited to contribute a lengthy article to *Youth Reference*, a magazine under the prominent *China Youth Daily*, the official newspaper of the Communist Youth League of China. Underscoring the importance of China’s advances in naval diplomacy as his overall theme, Li related how the 6th Destroyer Zhidui’s ships had visited Hong Kong and foreign countries more than a dozen times; received hundreds of foreign military visits; and conducted joint maritime exercises with foreign ships many times, some of which Li participated in himself. Li assigned great weight to an experience he had in Saint Petersburg: “I attended the New Year’s reception of the Russian Naval Academy in 2003. At that time, the Admiral who was President of the Academy took the initiative to toast to our Chinese cadets, and wished the Chinese cadets a happy New Year in front of more than 500 people, and wished the Chinese Navy development and growth. South Korean students were very envious and wanted to toast to the President, but the Dean of the Foreign Training Department stopped them. This incident seems small, but it is actually a comprehensive reflection of factors such as international status, military strength, and officer quality.”¹³

During 2006–09 Li served as a Deputy Commander of the 6th Destroyer Zhidui. In 2006, as a member of the Standing Committee of the 6th Destroyer Zhidui’s Party Committee, Li was credited with having conducted “in-depth research on information-based training for naval units.” Amid efforts to renovate and upgrade ship training simulation classrooms and strengthen training approaches, Li had the lead speaking role at a Party Committee Training Session designed to root out weaknesses and problems. He was credited with enumerating “more than 10 issues and analyz[ing] their causes with precision.” His participation in this event placed him at the forefront of efforts to improve service training.¹⁴ An

¹⁰ 李仲越 本报记者 钱晓虎 [Li Zhongyue, reporter of this newspaper, and Qian Xiaohu], 儒雅舰长训精兵 [The Elegant Captain Trains Elite Soldiers], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 2 October 2009, 12; “海军学员方队李汉军: 培养舰长不容易(图)” [Navy Cadet Formation Leader Li Hanjun: Cultivating Captains is Not Easy], Xinhua, 1 October 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2009-10/01/content_12136600.htm; 5 October 2009, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-10-05/1304569209.html>; 本报特约通讯员 邓佑标 [Special Correspondent Deng Youbiao], “大海的韵律——记海军学员方队” [The Rhythm of the Sea—A Record of the Naval Cadet Formation], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 18 November 2009, 6.

¹¹ 余子富 司彦文 [Yu Zifu and Si Yanwen], “一批优秀干部走上指挥岗位” [A Group of Outstanding Cadres Takes up Command Positions], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 28 September 2002; 余子富、记者司彦文 [Yu Zifu and reporter Si Yanwen], “中国东海舰队狠抓新装备部队人才建设” [China’s East China Sea Fleet Focuses on Talent Development for New Equipment Units], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 28 September 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20021020095039/http://www.people.com.cn/GB/junshi/60/20020928/833300.html>.

¹² 李仲越 本报记者 钱晓虎 [Li Zhongyue, reporter of this newspaper, and Qian Xiaohu], 儒雅舰长训精兵 [The Elegant Captain Trains Elite Soldiers], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 2 October 2009, 12.

¹³ 李汉军 [Li Hanjun], “2003-2004: 中国军事外交年” [2003-2004: China’s Year of Military Diplomacy], 青年参考 [Youth Reference], 22 June 2004, <https://archive.ph/tip6A#selection-793.7-795.4>.

¹⁴ 袁珍军 本报特约通讯员 蔡年迟 [Yuan Zhenjun, Special Correspondent of This Newspaper, Cai Nianchi], “议训会成了“曝光台”——亲历海军某驱逐舰支队党委议训会有感” [The Training Review Meeting Became a “Public Exposure Platform”—Reflections on Attending the Training Review Meeting of the Party Committee of a Certain Destroyer Squadron of the Navy], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 30 October 2006.

interview conducted in 2009 states that Li also served as Captain of a new-type guided missile frigate, almost certainly a Type 054A, the first of which was delivered in 2008.¹⁵

From at least spring through fall 2009, SCAPT Li served as a Deputy Commandant of his alma mater, Dalian Naval Academy. A 26 May 2009 *PLA Daily* article quotes Li as Deputy Commandant explaining his institution's implementation of a "'menu-style' trial lecture system" for evaluating faculty lesson plans that better engages faculty and students alike and "helps improve the overall quality of lesson preparation."¹⁶ A *Xinhua* article from 1 October 2009 still identified Li as a Deputy Commandant in Dalian,¹⁷ while a 23 September 2009 *Xinhua* article¹⁸ and an 18 November 2009 *PLA Daily* article referred to him as Director of the PLAN Headquarters Department's Training Department in Beijing.¹⁹ In what was apparently his final public action as second in the leadership of Dalian Naval Academy, Li led the Naval Cadet formation as its Commander, composed of Dalian Naval Academy undergraduates, for the 60th National Day Parade in Beijing on 1 October 2009.²⁰

From October 2009–November 2013, SCAPT Li Hanjun served as Director, PLAN Headquarters Department's Training Department (海军司令部训练部部长).²¹ Notably, a key rising star contemporary, then-SCAPT Li Pengcheng, served as Director of the PLAN Headquarters Department's Navigation Assurance Department from 2007–11, thereby overlapping with SCAPT Li Hanjun at PLAN HQ during 2009–11.²² In this capacity, Li Hanjun oversaw the implementation of new training and evaluation methods, including an emphasis on the innovative use of opposition forces.²³ In late July 2010, PLA Chief of General Staff General Chen Bingde personally led an exercise involving the largest

¹⁵ “海军学员方队李汉军：培养舰长不容易(图)” [Navy Cadet Formation Leader Li Hanjun: Cultivating Captains is Not Easy], *Xinhua*, 1 October 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2009-10/01/content_12136600.htm; 5 October 2009, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-10-05/1304569209.html>.

¹⁶ 邓佑标 [Deng Youbiao], “三个不等式说明了什么——海军大连舰艇学院抓教学质量的一段经历” [Three Inequalities Illustrate a Story—The Experience of the Dalian Naval Academy in Improving Teaching Quality], *解放军报* [PLA Daily], 26 May 2009, 10.

¹⁷ “海军学员方队李汉军：培养舰长不容易(图)” [Navy Cadet Formation Leader Li Hanjun: Cultivating Captains is Not Easy], *Xinhua*, 1 October 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2009-10/01/content_12136600.htm; 5 October 2009, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-10-05/1304569209.html>.

¹⁸ 记者陈万军、吴登峰 [Reporters Chen Wanjun and Wu Dengfeng], “海军 8 支方(梯)参加国庆阅兵南海舰队飞豹参阅” [Eight Naval Units Participated in National Day Review of the Troops, and South Sea Fleet Flying Leopard Fighter Jets Also Participated], *新华网* [Xinhua Net], 23 September 2009, formerly at http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2009-09/24/content_18590449.htm, now available via <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJmsz5>.

¹⁹ 本报特约通讯员 邓佑标 [Special Correspondent Deng Youbiao], “大海的韵律——记海军学员方队” [The Rhythm of the Sea—A Record of the Naval Cadet Formation], *解放军报* [PLA Daily], 18 November 2009, 6, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-11-18/0650574239.html>.

²⁰ “海军学员方队李汉军：培养舰长不容易(图)” [Navy Cadet Formation Leader Li Hanjun: Cultivating Captains is Not Easy], *Xinhua*, 1 October 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2009-10/01/content_12136600.htm; 5 October 2009, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-10-05/1304569209.html>.

²¹ 记者陈万军、吴登峰 [Reporters Chen Wanjun and Wu Dengfeng], “海军 8 支方(梯)参加国庆阅兵南海舰队飞豹参阅” [Eight Naval Units Participated in National Day Review of the Troops, and South Sea Fleet Flying Leopard Fighter Jets Also Participated], *新华网* [Xinhua Net], 23 September 2009, formerly at http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2009-09/24/content_18590449.htm, now available via <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJmsz5>.

²² Christopher H. Sharman and Andrew S. Erickson, *Dirty But Preparing to Fight: VADM Li Pengcheng's Downfall Amid Increasing PLAN Readiness*, China Maritime Report 44 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 24 January 2025), 5, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/44/>.

²³ 记者钱晓虎、通讯员李贵宾 [Reporter Qian Xiaohu and Correspondent Li Guibin], “海军某驱逐舰支队年终训练考核邀请 3 个兵种出考题‘密封卷’藏在对手脑袋里” [A Certain Destroyer Squadron of the Navy Invited Three Military Branches to Set Exam Questions for its Year-End Training Assessment. The “Sealed Exam Papers” Were Hidden in the Minds of the Opposing Team.], *解放军报* [PLA Daily], 16 November 2009, 5.

number of servicemembers in recent years, as well as nearly 100 warships and dozens of warplanes. The multi-service joint exercise in a complex electromagnetic environment proved a great success, and Chen hailed it as a model for the PLA writ large. Li Hanjun, given an exclusive interview with *People's Navy* reporters and the last word in their article, explained that “Multi-service joint training has gradually become a regular mode of naval training, and even ordinary maritime training is no longer a ‘one-man show’ for a single service.”²⁴ In January 2011, SCAPT Li Hanjun articulated to *People's Navy* a comprehensive regimen of instructional and training reforms to be implemented over the next 2–3 years. The sweeping measures included a battery of new guidance, instructions, curricula, textbooks, exercises, and evaluations, with informatization and integration emphasized throughout.²⁵

Entering his final year in the position as Director of the Training Department, in September 2012 SCAPT Li was profiled in an extensive interview on the front page of his service's internal newspaper, *People's Navy*. Like then-SCAPT Li Pengcheng during his innovative commanding of the 16th Naval Escort Task Force in the Gulf of Aden in December 2013, SCAPT Li Hanjun was featured prominently precisely where the top brass would all have seen it—an advantageous position indeed. Li expounded on his service's official training plans and ongoing training reforms. He emphasized the imperative to enhance the quality and modalities of training in order to exploit informatization, support “the new mode of generating combat effectiveness,” and thereby successfully address “new forms of warfare and operational patterns.” An urgent priority, Li explained, was generating “large-scale joint combat capabilities to ‘oppose independence and promote reunification’” (“反独促统”大规模联合作战能力)—a clear reference to Taiwan scenarios. While on the surface the sort of officially sanctioned virtue signaling that powers promotion to higher levels, Li's statements were also rooted firmly in ongoing advances in actual PLAN capabilities that were readily observable to outside observers.²⁶

In May 2013, Li was involved in a seven-day command confrontation exercise involving a joint combat formation command post.²⁷ The drill tested existing PLAN operational plans and promoted the innovative development of joint combat tactics and training methods under informatized conditions. North and East Sea Fleet bases participated, with strong support from the Naval Command College in Nanjing—the PLAN's seniormost school, ranked first in protocol order.²⁸ This last event seemed to foreshadow Li's next known position.

²⁴ 本报记者吴超 [Our reporter Wu Chao], “诸兵种一体大联合, 引领联演联训新风潮” [All Service Arms Are United, Leading a New Trend of Joint Exercises and Training], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 17 December 2010, 1.

²⁵ 本报记者刘文平 [Our reporter Liu Wenping], “适应信息化条件下战斗力生成模式的转变需求: 海军将推进首长机关训练 ‘六个一工程’ 建设” [Adapting to the Changing Needs of Combat Power Generation Mode under Informatized Conditions: The Navy Will Promote the Construction of the “Six One Projects” for the Training of Chief Organs], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 10 January 2011, 1.

²⁶ 本报记者梁庆松 [Our Reporter Liang Qingsong], “改革创新是军事训练发展的永恒主题--访海司军训部部长李汉军” [Reform and Innovation are the Eternal Themes of Military Training Development--Interview with Li Hanjun, Director of the PLAN Headquarters Training Department], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 21 September 2012, 4.

²⁷ 周田 [Zhou Tian], “横戈未来勇探索--海军组织战法训法创新活动暨指挥对抗演习纪实” [Strongly Exploring the Future: A Record of the Navy's Organization of Innovative Activities in Tactics and Training Methods for Command Confrontation Exercises], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 21 May 2013, 1.

²⁸ For details on the Naval Command College's extensive participation in PLAN exercises, see Andrew S. Erickson, *The People of China's Navy and Other Maritime Forces: Extended Summary of Conference Findings*, China Maritime Report 47 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 28 May 2025), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/47/>; China Maritime Studies Institute, “The People of China's Navy and Other Maritime Forces,” *Quick Look Summary of Conference Findings* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 22 May 2025), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-findings/1/>.

Li's position from November 2013–April 2014 remains unclear, but he subsequently transitioned to leadership in naval education, coming full circle from his own undergraduate, military parade, and exercise experience. From April 2014–December 2014, SCAPT Li served as Director of the Naval Command College's Training Department (海军指挥学院训练部部长).

On 29 December 2014, at a ceremony over which PLAN Commander Wu Shengli and Political Commissar Admiral Miao Hua presided, Li was promoted to Rear Admiral (RADM/海军少将) and appointed Commander of the then-East Sea Fleet (now ETCN) Fujian Base (东海舰队福建基地/东部战区海军福建基地, Unit 92403), a position he held through July 2017.²⁹ RADM Li's 2014 promotion coincides with Admiral Miao's becoming PLAN Political Commissar,³⁰ and Li's subsequent promotions all occurred during Miao's ascendancy to influence PLAN, and ultimately all PLA, promotions.³¹ Li's succession of positions around this time certainly suggest the speed with which he advanced in his career.

Building on his East China Sea-centric experience, as Fujian Base Commander Li had a strategic role overseeing significant PLAN unit training, coastal defense operations, operational readiness, and preparation for major contingencies—particularly a frontline focus on Taiwan. In this capacity, in January 2015, Li was the operations officer for an East Sea Fleet warship formation (编队参谋长) during long-range “far seas” (远海) training exercise in the Western Pacific. “What is realistic training?” he told the PLAN's official magazine. “This training is the proof. Only through such high-intensity saturation-style confrontational training can we further identify issues, resolve them, gain a clear understanding of our capabilities, and build confidence, thereby breaking free from the vicious cycle of ‘the less we know, the less we dare to train, and the less we dare to train, the less we know.’”³² In March 2015, Li was quoted as stressing the all-consuming imperative to be ready to fight and win at sea.³³ In early May 2015, Li led a major training session at his base that forced commanders at the division, brigade, and regiment level to consider closely bottlenecks, deficiencies, and how to enhance their command capabilities. Li explained that they embraced “new concepts of systematic operations, joint operations, and information victory” to enhance their ability to command under realistic informatized

²⁹ 张海鹏 本报记者张庆宝 [Zhang Haipeng and our reporter Zhang Qingbao], “海军隆重举行将官军衔晋升仪式 吴胜利宣读命令 苗华主持仪式” [The Navy Held a Grand ceremony to Promote Admirals. Wu Shengli Read Out the Orders, Miao Hua Presided over the Ceremony], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 30 December 2014, 1; 吴耀谦 蒋曦 [Wu Yaoqian and Jiang Xi], “海军总部将领调整到位, 12 名海军大校晋升少将军衔” [The Admirals of the Naval Headquarters Were Adjusted in Place, and 12 Senior Captains Were Promoted to the Rank of Rear Admiral], 澎湃新闻 [Pengpai News], https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1291014.

³⁰ Miao was a career Army political officer until he became the PLAN Political Commissar. He did not receive his third star as an Admiral (海军上将) until July 2015.

³¹ “解放军海军参谋长李汉军被免全国人代 学者判断牵扯苗华案” [Li Hanjun, Chief of Staff of the PLA Navy, Was Removed From the National People's Congress; Scholars Believe He Was Involved in the Miao Hua Case], 联合早报 [Lianhe Zaobao], 27 June 2025, <https://www.zaobao.com.sg/news/china/story20250627-6989413>.

³² 本刊记者刘文平 张庆宝 方立华 代宗锋 [Our Reporters Liu Wenping, Zhang Qingbao, Fang Lihua, and Dai Zongfeng], “东海舰队: 赴西太平洋实兵对抗训练” [East Sea Fleet: Going to the Western Pacific for Live-Fire Confrontation Training], 当代海军 [Navy Today] (January 2015). For a similar quotation and context, see 本报记者刘文平 张庆宝 东海站记者方立华 代宗锋 [Our Reporters Liu Wenping and Zhang Qingbao, and East China Sea Station Reporters Fang Lihua and Dai Zongfeng], “砺兵, 对接未来海战爆—东海舰队舰艇编队远海训练见闻录” [Soldiers Are Trained to Prepare for Future Naval Battles—Records of the East Sea Fleet's Fleet Training in the Open Sea], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 7 January 2015, 4.

³³ “有一种信念在强化 有一种使命在升腾” [There is a Belief that is Strengthening and a Mission that is Rising], [People's Navy], 30 March 2015, 2.

conditions, and thereby to fight and win actual battles.³⁴ In keeping with his responsibility to support the Party above all else, on 16 May 2015 Li hosted and participated in a major ideological work conference at the Fujian Base.³⁵

Li subsequently served in two successive CMC roles. From July 2017–June 2018, RADM Li served as a Deputy Director of the CMC Office for Reform and Organizational Structure (中央军委改革和编制办公室副主任).³⁶ Established in January 2016, this first-level department under the CMC is responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing national defense and military reforms and managing military staffing and organization.³⁷ As a Deputy Director, Li assisted the Director in planning reforms, coordinating implementation across branches, and managing PLA organizational structure and personnel allocations. Within the upper echelons of China’s military leadership, Li shaped PLA-wide structural reforms, from streamlining forces and regional commands to revising personnel frameworks. On 23 July 2017, Li appeared with two other Deputy Directors in the seventh episode of the major political feature film “The Road to a Strong Army” (Part 1) on CCTV.³⁸

From June 2018–December 2021, RADM Li served as a Deputy Director of the CMC Training and Administration Department (中央军委训练管理部副部长).³⁹ Established in November 2015 as a first-tier, Vice-Commander-level organ under the CMC, the Department was designed to further the unified planning and oversight of military training for the entire PLA, improve the management of servicemembers and schoolhouses, better integrate training and unit administration to enhance rule-based military governance and strengthen warfighting capacity.⁴⁰ In this capacity, Li helped oversee PLA-wide military training and administrative policy. In a sign of inter-service awareness and

³⁴ 沈音翔 见习记者梅云龙 [Shen Yinxiang and trainee reporter Mei Yunlong], “东海舰队某基地--由练程序向练谋略转型 由训参谋向训指挥员转变--战役理论脚集训打造‘最强大脑’” [A Certain East Sea Fleet Base—Transformed from Training Procedures to Training Strategies, From Training Staff to Training Commanders—Combat Theory Training to Create the ‘Strongest Brain’], 人民海军 [People’s Navy], 9 June 2015, 1.

³⁵ The event invoked the Gutian Conference of 28-29 December 1929 under Mao, with its “Gutian Resolution”: “The Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party.” “警赐‘本色基因’退化--追本溯源做红色传统新传人” [Warning Against the Degeneration of “Original Genes”—Tracing Back to the Source and Becoming New Inheritors of Red Traditions], final section in 见习记者梅云龙 通讯员宋效英 沈音翔 [Trainee Reporter Mei Yunlong, Correspondents Song Xiaoying and Shen Yinxiang], “红色圣地的精神洗礼--东海舰队某基地学习贯彻全军政治工作会议精神研讨班侧记” [Spiritual Baptism in the Red Sacred Land—Notes on the Seminar on Learning and Implementing the Spirit of the All Army Political Work Conference at a Certain East Sea Fleet Base], 人民海军 [People’s Navy], 9 June 2015, 3.

³⁶ 岳怀让 [Yue Huairang], “海军少将李汉军调任军委训练管理部副部长” [Rear Admiral Li Hanjun Transferred to Serve as Deputy Director, CMC Office for Reform and Organizational Structure], 澎湃新闻 [Pengpai News], 2 June 2018, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2169557; <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/m/mil/2018/06-02/8528927.shtml>; <https://archive.ph/oYy2N>.

³⁷ “首次披露！军委关键部门领导团队集体亮相” [Disclosure for the First Time! The Leading Team of a Key Department of the Central Military Commission Made a Collective Appearance], 新浪军事 [Sina Military], 24 July 2017, <https://mil.sina.cn/zgjq/2017-07-24/detail-ifyihrmf3268341.d.html>.

³⁸ 王俊 [Wang Jun], “多位将领职务调整信息披露：毕京不再担任国防大学副校长” [Information Disclosure Regarding the Positional Adjustment of Many Flag and General Officers: Bi Jingjing is No Longer the Vice President of National Defense University], 澎湃新闻 [Pengpai News], 23 July 2017, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1740338.

³⁹ 岳怀让 [Yue Huairang], “海军少将李汉军调任军委训练管理部副部长” [Rear Admiral Li Hanjun Transferred to Serve as Deputy Director, CMC Office for Reform and Organizational Structure], 澎湃新闻 [Pengpai News], 2 June 2018, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2169557; <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/m/mil/2018/06-02/8528927.shtml>; <https://archive.ph/oYy2N>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

credibility, on 5 July 2018 Li attended the PLA Air Force's Biannual Military Training Video Teleconference (半年军事训练电视电话会议) in Beijing to offer guidance.⁴¹

From December 2021–April 2024, RADM Li was back at the Naval Command College in Nanjing, this time as its Commandant (海军指挥学院院长).⁴² On 14 June 2022, together with RADM Li Pengcheng and the other PLAN top brass, RADM Li Hanjun served as one of 28 executive chairmen of the opening ceremony of the 13th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party Navy at PLAN Headquarters, which convened more than 500 PLAN Party representatives to discuss major Navy affairs and development plans.⁴³ In February 2023, Li was selected as one of 281 delegates from the PLA and People's Armed Police Force to the 14th NPC, the first session of which he participated in the following month.⁴⁴ As a military deputy (delegate) attending the NPC and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Li embraced Xi's "three-step" military development goals for 2027, 2035, and 2049. "Advancing the Centennial Military Building Goal [of 2027] is a profound change that affects the overall development of our military," Li intoned. Among urgent efforts to overcome obstacles and

⁴¹ 许毅 [Xu Yi] and 黄琳颖 [Huang Linying], "空军召开半年军事训练电视电话会议暨新型飞行教官培训任务阶段总结部署会强调—坚决贯彻统帅训令, 强力推进训练改革—依法治训保证实战化训练向纵深发展—丁来杭于忠福出席并讲话" [The Air Force Held a Biannual Military Training Video Teleconference and a Summary and Deployment Meeting for the New Flight Instructor Training Mission Phase, Emphasizing That the Commander-in-Chief's Orders should be Resolutely Implemented and Training Reforms Should be Vigorously Promoted. The Rule of Law Should Ensure that Practical Training Will Develop in Depth. Ding Laihang and Yu Zhongfu Attended the Meeting and Gave Speeches.], 空军报 [Air Force News], 6 July 2018, 1.

⁴² In January 2021 Li's predecessor, RADM Han Xiaohu (韩小虎), was still Commandant of the Naval Command College. 政治工作处 [Political Work Division], "海军指挥学院举行军官晋升军衔仪式" [Navy Command College Holds Officer Promotion Ceremony], 海军指挥学院 [Naval Command College], 30 January 2021, <https://archive.ph/2dkrE>. The post in the following link was edited, likely right after news broke of Li's removal from the NPC. 政治工作处 [Political Work Division], "海军指挥学院举办首届'半山论坛'" [Naval Command College Holds First "Banshan Forum"], 海军指挥学院 [Naval Command College], 19 December 2021, <https://archive.ph/xNTQQ>. A screenshot from the Baidu search preview featuring text from the original unedited version of this post indicates that Li was Commandant as early as December 2021: "2021年12月19日以'智能化时代的新质海军'为主题的学院首届'半山论坛'共设置了一个主旨论坛和5个平行分论坛, 为期2天。开模式上, 学院熊照元政委致开模辞, 李汉军院长作主旨发言。" (On 19 December 2021, the first "Banshan Forum" of the College with the theme of "New Quality Navy in the Era of Intelligization" Set up a main forum and 5 parallel sub-forums for a period of 2 days. At the opening ceremony, the College's Political Commissar, Xiong Zhaoyuan, delivered a speech, and the Commandant, Li Hanjun, made a keynote speech.) Here is documentation of Li still serving as Commandant in December 2023: 编辑: 山石 [Editor: Shan Shi] 责编: 燕元 [Editor-in-Chief: Yan Yuan], "北京大学-中国人民解放军海军指挥学院军事教育创新与战略思维提升培训班开班" [Peking University-People's Liberation Army Naval Command College Military Education Innovation and Strategic Thinking Improvement Training Course Opens], 继续教育学院 [School of Continuing Education], Peking University, 12 December 2023, <https://news.pku.edu.cn/xwzh/485456a9f45841ad828e218aca522bc6.htm>; <https://archive.ph/SAwK6>.

⁴³ 郑祖 记者牛涛 王汉唐 [Zheng Zu and reporters Niu Tao and Wang Hantang], 高举习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想伟大旗帜奋进全面建成世界一流海军新征程--中国共产党建军十三次代表大会隆重开幕--袁华智同志作海军第十二届党委报告董军同志主持大会并致开幕词刘训言同志作海军纪委工作报告 [Hold High the Great Banner of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and Forge Ahead on the New Journey of Building a World-Class Navy—The 13th Congress of the Communist Party of China on the Founding of the People's Liberation Army Opened Grandly—Comrade Yuan Huazhi Delivered a Report on the 12th Party Committee of the Navy. Comrade Dong Jun Presided over the Meeting and Delivered an Opening Speech. Comrade Liu Xunyan Delivered a Work Report on the Navy Discipline Inspection Commission], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 15 June 2022, 1.

⁴⁴ "中华人民共和国第十四届全国人民代表大会代表名单 (2977名, 各选举单位选出的代表均按姓名笔划排列)" [List of Deputies to the 14th National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (2,977 persons, representatives elected by each electoral unit are arranged in alphabetical order by Surname Strokes)], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 25 February 2023, 2.

accelerate progress, he called for “focusing on combat readiness.”⁴⁵ In December 2023, Li was promoted to Vice Admiral. As Naval Command College Commandant, Li built on an ongoing partnership with Peking University to bring some of his faculty, staff, and students there for learning and exchange in December 2023.⁴⁶ On 5 March 2024, at the opening of the second session of the 14th NPC, VADM Li Hanjun joined fellow deputies and military representatives, including VADM Li Pengcheng, in discussing progress and remaining requirements for the reform and strengthening of China’s military. “The current and future period is a critical period for the modernization of national defense and the military,” Li Hanjun emphasized.⁴⁷ It would prove to be the last NPC attendance for both of them.

From April 2024–June 2025, VADM Li served as the PLAN’s Chief of Staff. He succeeded now-PLAN Commander Admiral Hu Zhongming, who had left the position on 26 December 2023 to become PLAN Commander.⁴⁸ As Chief of Staff, Li was head of the PLAN Staff Department, and thereby in charge of the major bureaus at the PLAN Headquarters, such as the Training Bureau, Operations Bureau, Planning and Organization Bureau.⁴⁹ Accordingly, he was involved in all the key policy decisions pertaining to the future of the service. That Hu Zhongming was his predecessor there further suggests the importance of the post. Li’s first observable public appearance as Chief of Staff occurred in April 2024.⁵⁰ On 24 April 2024, Li attended a major ceremony at the Navy Museum in Qingdao together with PLAN Commander Hu and Political Commissar Admiral Yuan Huazhi, presided over by Deputy Political Commissar Cheng Jian.⁵¹ Li visited a museum at Renmin University of China in Beijing on 12 July

⁴⁵ 本报记者 钱晓虎 [Our Reporter Qian Xiaohu], “强军兴军铸伟业 昂扬奋进启新程--军队代表委员热议习主席提出党在新时代的强军目标 10 周年” [Strengthening the Military and Building a Strong Army to Achieve Great Deeds: Marching Forward with High Spirits to Embark on a New Journey—Military Delegates and Representatives Discuss the 10th Anniversary of President Xi Jinping’s Proposal of the Party’s Military Goals for the New Era], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 5 March 2023, 3.

⁴⁶ 编辑: 山石 [Editor: Shan Shi] 责编: 燕元 [Editor-in-Chief: Yan Yuan], “北京大学-中国人民解放军海军指挥学院军事教育创新与战略思维提升培训班开班” [Peking University-People’s Liberation Army Naval Command College Military Education Innovation and Strategic Thinking Improvement Training Course Opens], 继续教育学院 [School of Continuing Education], Peking University, 12 December 2023, <https://news.pku.edu.cn/xwzh/485456a9f45841ad828e218aca522bc6.htm>; <https://archive.ph/SaWk6>.

⁴⁷ 本报记者 钱晓虎 王旭 谭琳 [Our reporters Qian Xiaohu, Wang Xu, and Tan Lin], “开新图强 制胜未来--军队代表委员畅谈全面实施改革强军战略” [Opening up New Horizons and Striving for a Stronger Future—Military Representatives and Members Talk About the Comprehensive Implementation of the Strategy of Reforming and Strengthening the Military], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 5 March 2024, 6.

⁴⁸ Christopher H. Sharman and Andrew S. Erickson, “Admiral Hu to the Helm: China’s New Navy Commander Brings Operational Expertise,” *CMSI Note* 1 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 27 December 2023), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/1/>.

⁴⁹ Other PLAN Headquarters bureaus include the Naval Intelligence Bureau, Political Work Bureau, Discipline Inspection Bureau, Logistics Bureau, and Equipment Bureau.

⁵⁰ “海军参谋长李汉军, 被罢免全国人大代表职务” [Li Hanjun, Chief of Naval Staff, Was Dismissed as a Deputy to the National People’s Congress], 观察网 [Observer Net], 27 June 2025, https://www.guancha.cn/military-affairs/2025_06_27_781022.shtml.

⁵¹ 观海新闻/青报全媒体记者通讯员范晓昱王汉唐 [Guanhai News/Qingdao Daily All-Media Reporter Correspondents Fan Xiaoyu Wang Hantang], “致敬海军英雄矢志奋斗强军--致敬人民海军英雄仪式--在海军博物馆隆重举行” [Salute to the Heroes of the People’s Navy and their Determination to Strengthen the Military—A Ceremony to Salute the Heroes of the People’s Navy was held at the Navy Museum], 青岛日报 [Qingdao Daily], 24 April 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240730203751/https://epaper.qingdaonews.com/qdzb/resfile/2024-04-24/A02/qdzb-20240424-A02.pdf>.

2024.⁵² Of note, despite his inherently public role, Admiral Yuan has not been observed or heard from publicly since 7 September 2024.

Conclusion: Burning Talent, More to Spare—Churn “Priced in”?

VADM Li Hanjun was an extremely competent naval officer, someone who made significant contributions to both the PLAN and to the PLA more generally. Yet that did not save him from being sacked. His perceived transgressions—whatever they were—were clearly judged more important than his past achievements and potential future offerings.

VADM Li has influenced a generation of current PLAN operational leaders, particularly through training and education. His previous senior roles at both the Dalian Naval Academy, and as Commandant of the Nanjing Naval Command Academy until last year, suggest he was well known across the fleet. His relentless pursuit of rigor in training likely has served as a template for the PLAN’s current high-intensity training focus. Moreover, his influential position as a Deputy Director of the CMC Training and Administration Department would have enabled him to help to shape training across the force and to help codify PLAN training initiatives. VADM Li’s service and joint pedigree—including his recent high-profile role as the PLAN Chief of Staff, in particular—also suggest he was once among the few who might be considered by Xi to serve as a future PLAN Commander. His defenestration, therefore, is likely to send shivers across the PLAN’s current force.

While all services are working to some degree or another on developing “joint” capabilities, VADM Li’s recognition of multi-service joint training’s value is particularly noteworthy. His featured role in the 2010 joint exercise and his participation in the Air Force Biannual Military Training Video Teleconference in 2018 suggests he may have played an outsized role throughout the more senior portion of his career in influencing the PLAN’s contribution to overall PLA joint training. His CMC role in organizational reforms around 2017 is incredibly important. The PLA organizational reforms “below the neck” began that year, and those “above the neck” had occurred just two years earlier. Li was doubtless responsible for helping to guide the PLA and the PLAN through the inevitable challenges accompanied these reforms. Li’s focus on jointness is far more than an intra-service focus, and affords a rare glimpse into interservice joint efforts.

VADM Li’s operational prowess will certainly be missed in the PLAN. His purge comes just months after another leader with tremendous operational experience, VADM Li Pengcheng, was removed. Their respective careers indicate the two men were peers, overlapping at several points in their moves up through the ranks. Li Hanjun was promoted and noted near Li Pengcheng at several points along the way, including his promotion to flag, their overlapping at PLAN HQ during 2009–11, and their respective service as deputies to the 13th and 14th NPCs. While the reasons for both their removals remain opaque to foreign observers, their respective connections to, and promotions overseen by, Admiral Miao Hua may well have been their downfall. Li Hanjun shared with Miao Hua an early Taiwan-centric career focus in Fujian Province, in what was then the Nanjing Military Region and is now the Eastern Theater Command. Li Hanjun’s 2014 rank promotion coincides with Miao’s becoming PLAN Political Commissar, and Li’s subsequent promotions all occurred during Miao’s ascendance to influence PLAN, and ultimately all PLA, promotions.

⁵² “海军参谋长李汉军中将等参观家书博物馆” [Vice Admiral Li Hanjun, Chief of Naval Staff, and Others Visited the Family Letters Museum], 中国人民大学家书博物馆 [The Family Letters Museum of Renmin University of China], 7 July 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250306163727/https://jiashu.ruc.edu.cn/zxxx/b908d805b38942338dbc375ea69ff01a.htm>.

Despite the removal of Admirals Li Hanjun, Li Pengcheng, Miao Hua, and others, however, the PLAN continues to demonstrate first-rate operational capabilities of constantly growing strength and sophistication—the most recent of which was the PLAN’s first-ever dual aircraft carrier operations in the Western Pacific, an unprecedented feat conducted shortly before their termination was announced. As Chief of Staff, VADM Li Hanjun could well have been in the approval chain for these historic carrier operations. The removal of these leading flag officers does not appear to have slowed the pace of PLAN training or altered the course of developing the capabilities that Xi demands. These removals, which have not produced any negative observable operational impact, would suggest that Xi believes he can burn through a tremendous amount of talent to make the PLA into the force he envisions. If Xi continues to feel he can afford this price, then we must seriously take into consideration the possibility that a degree of military leadership churn is “priced in” to his approach to building the world-class and Taiwan-relevant forces that he so urgently seeks.