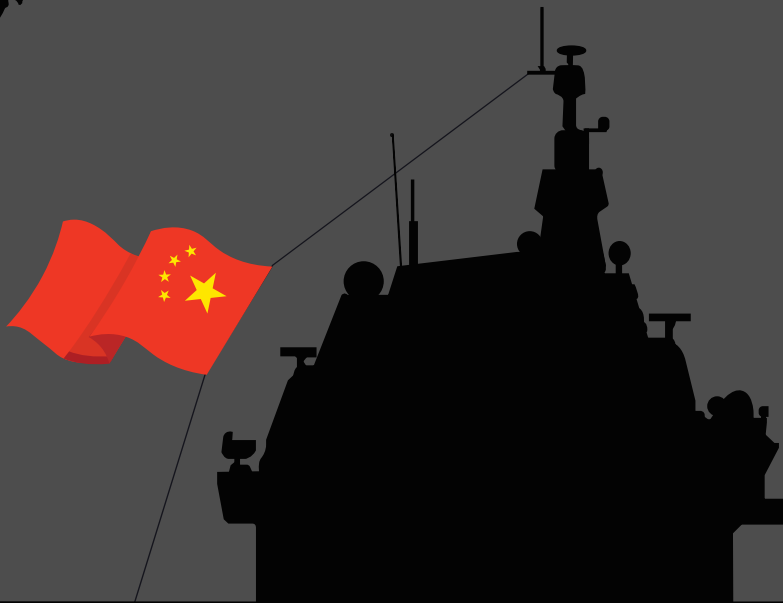




中国海事研究所  
China Maritime Studies Institute

# NOTES: 20



**Flying Higher and Higher:**

VADM Cui Yuzhong  
Moving Up in Complex Times



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**CMSI NOTE #20 /// 25 FEBRUARY 2026**

## **Flying Higher and Higher: VADM Cui Yuzhong Moving Up in Complex Times<sup>1</sup>**

**Jordan Shaw,<sup>2</sup> Andrew S. Erickson,<sup>3</sup> and Christopher H. Sharman<sup>4</sup>**

### **Key Takeaways:**

- On 5 November 2025, the aircraft carrier Fujian (福建舰) was commissioned into People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy (PLAN) service. One man was notably absent on this auspicious day—the PLAN Commander himself, Admiral (ADM) Hu Zhongming (胡中明), the leader CMSI profiled in *CMSI Note 1*.<sup>5</sup> Instead, Vice Admiral (VADM) Cui Yuzhong (崔玉忠) was one of the PLAN's senior representatives attending the ceremony. Cui's high-profile appearance on the PLAN's red-letter day may portend that Cui is slated to assume the highest PLAN billet.
- A career naval aviator and seasoned operational officer, VADM Cui's expertise and record aligns well with the PLAN's growing emphasis on carrier aviation. He received a well-rounded education across four PLA academic institutions and served in leadership billets in North Sea Fleet Aviation, East Sea Fleet Aviation, East Sea Fleet, Eastern Theater Command, and PLAN headquarters.
- VADM Cui's steady political climb suggests that he built and earned political trust among the highest authorities, as he was elected as a National People's Congress delegate, a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – Central Committee (CC) Alternate Member, and member of Jiang Zemin's (江泽民) Funeral Committee.
- VADM Cui's interactions with the now-removed Central Military Commission (CMC) Political Work Department Director Admiral Miao Hua (苗华) and PLAN Political Commissar Admiral Yuan Huazhi (袁华智) may complicate his future career aspirations.

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<sup>1</sup> The views and opinions expressed here are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Department of War, or any other U.S. government entity.

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<sup>5</sup> 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/>.

## An Absence Too Loud to Ignore:

On 5 November 2025, CMC Chairman Xi Jinping attended the commissioning ceremony of the aircraft carrier *Fujian* in Sanya, Hainan, which marked the PRC and PLAN entering the “era of three aircraft carriers” (三航母时代).<sup>6</sup> During this special day for the PLAN, one man was notably absent—the PLAN Commander himself, ADM Hu Zhongming. Typically, PLAN senior leadership would be expected to attend such major events. It is difficult to imagine what could possibly be a higher priority.

Instead, it was VADM Cui Yuzhong (崔玉忠) and PLAN Deputy Political Commissar (serving as Acting Political Commissar) VADM Leng Shaojie (冷少杰)—a figure covered in *CMSI Note* 16<sup>7</sup>—who accompanied Chairman Xi on a tour of *Fujian*. On this tour, Chairman Xi received a briefing on *Fujian*’s capabilities, inspected the ship’s facilities, chatted with the crew about their respective duties, and tested the aircraft carrier’s electromagnetic aircraft launch system.

The high-profile appearance of Cui at the PLAN’s watershed milestone could indicate that Cui is slated to assume the highest PLAN billet.



Figure 1: VADMs Cui (circled in red) and Leng Shaojie (circled in blue) accompany Chairman Xi up the brow to *Fujian*.

<sup>6</sup> “我国第一艘电磁弹射型航空母舰入列 习近平出席入列授旗仪式并登舰视察 | CCTV「新闻联播」20251107,” [China’s First Electromagnetic Catapult-Equipped Aircraft Carrier was Commissioned Xi Jinping Attended the Commissioning Ceremony and Inspected the Ship], 「新闻联播」[News Broadcast], CCTV, 7 November 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIOwXZYGqCk>.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, “Confirmed: ADM Yuan Huazhi Removed as the PLAN’s Political Commissar,” *CMSI Note* 16 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 4 September 2025), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/16/>.

## A Viable Heir Apparent

Born in December 1963, Cui's hometown is Hailun County, Heilongjiang Province (黑龙江省海伦县). He joined the military in June 1980 as a cadet at the PLAAF Aviation School (中国人民解放军空军航空学院). After graduation, he systematically moved up the grades, ranks, and billets in naval aviation, including pilot, squadron commander, (aviation) group commander, (aviation) regiment commander, training base commander, and North Sea Fleet Aviation Chief of Staff.<sup>8</sup> Between his operational billets, Cui, as part of his advanced education and professional development, studied at the Naval Command College (海军指挥学院), National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学), and National Defense University (国防大学).<sup>9</sup>

Around November 2013, Cui was transferred to PLAN Headquarters where he became an Assistant to the Chief of Staff, Headquarters Department, PLA Navy.<sup>10</sup> In July 2014, Cui was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral (RADM); among the other officers promoted in the same ceremony was then-Commander of Unit 92730 Hu Zhongming.<sup>11</sup> At PLAN headquarters, Cui engaged in a variety of service-wide issues for the first time, representing a major milestone for Cui's career. Such issues included: (1) annual training and management, whereby each Sea Fleet reported training results from 2013 and PLAN headquarters assigned new training goals to each Sea Fleet for 2014;<sup>12</sup> (2) aviation training work, wherein PLAN headquarters issued flight training and safety requirements for the new year;<sup>13</sup> (3) equipment maintenance training, wherein the PLAN held its first-ever formalized group training session on aviation equipment maintenance and support;<sup>14</sup> (4) flight safety, whereby senior PLAN officers participated in a

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<sup>8</sup> "Rear Admiral Cui Yuzhong, Deputy Commander of East Sea Fleet (also Commander of East Sea Fleet Aviation), Chinese PLA Navy," biography from Galle Dialogue 2017 International Maritime Conference, *Galle Dialogue*, 9-10 October 2017,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015928/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD\\_2017/research\\_papers/cv/rear\\_admiral\\_cui\\_yuzhong\\_cv.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015928/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD_2017/research_papers/cv/rear_admiral_cui_yuzhong_cv.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> "Rear Admiral Cui Yuzhong, Deputy Commander of East Sea Fleet (also Commander of East Sea Fleet Aviation), Chinese PLA Navy," biography from Galle Dialogue 2017 International Maritime Conference, *Galle Dialogue*, 9-10 October 2017,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015928/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD\\_2017/research\\_papers/cv/rear\\_admiral\\_cui\\_yuzhong\\_cv.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015928/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD_2017/research_papers/cv/rear_admiral_cui_yuzhong_cv.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> 张浩然 [Zhang Haoran], 海军组织航空装备维修管理领导干部集训 [PLAN Organizes Group Training for Leading Cadres in Aviation Equipment Maintenance and Management], 人民海军 [*People's Navy*], 26 November 2013, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> 张海鹏 [Zhang Haipeng], 海军隆重举行将官军衔晋升仪式 ["The PLAN Held a Promotion Ceremony For Its Flag Officers"], 人民海军 [*People's Navy*], 11 July 2014, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> 陆壮 [Lu Zhuang], 徐新雷 [Xu Xinlei], 曹万浩 [Cao Wanhao], 陈泉 [Chen Xiao] and 梁庆松 [Liang Qingsong], 海军年度训练和管理工作会议召开 认真贯彻强军目标战略思想 努力开创和训练和管理新局面 ["Thoroughly Implement the Strategic Thinking of Strengthening the Armed Forces and Strive to Create a New Situation in Training and Management"], 人民海军 [*People's Navy*], 11 January 2014, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> 余国锋 [Yu Guofeng], 彭超 [Peng Chao], 张庆宝 [Zhang Qingbao], 海军隆重召开护航任务表彰大会 ["The PLA Navy Held a Grand Commendation Ceremony For an Escort Mission"], 人民海军 [*People's Navy*], 6 January 2014, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> 刘文平 [Liu Wenping], 高宏伟 [Gao Hongwei], and 吴宇华 [Wu Yuhua], 海军组织首届航空装备维修保障正规化集训 ["The PLAN Held Its First Standardized Aviation Equipment Maintenance and Support Training Program"], 人民海军 [*People's Navy*], 19 March 2014, p. 1.

special meeting on analyzing the PLAN's flight safety since 2010;<sup>15</sup> (5) civil-military relations building, wherein senior officers visited PLAN-run kindergartens on (International) Children's Day;<sup>16</sup> (6) headquarters training, wherein headquarters' leadership underwent receive briefings on a key topics;<sup>17</sup> and (7) interacting with foreign navies.<sup>18</sup>

By July 2016, Cui was transferred out of Beijing and to Zhejiang province, as he had been promoted into the dual-hatted billets of Deputy Commander, East Sea Fleet and Commander, East Sea Fleet Aviation.<sup>19</sup> In September 2017, Cui was elected as a delegate to the CCP's 19th National Congress.<sup>20</sup> This was an early sign of higher authorities putting significant political trust in Cui.<sup>21</sup> About one month later in October 2017, Cui led a PLAN delegation to attend "Galle Dialogue-2017," a multilateral forum for navies, coast guards, and maritime forces primarily based in the Asia Pacific to discuss and deliberate on maritime-related issues, hosted by the Sri Lankan Navy.<sup>22</sup> The theme of the 2017 conference was "Greater Maritime Visibility for Enhanced Maritime Security." RADM Cui wrote a conference paper<sup>23</sup> and gave a presentation titled "Building a Community of Shared Future for Mankind and Pragmatically Enhancing Maritime Security Cooperation."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 周志华 [Zhou Zhihua], 海军召开飞行安全专题分析会 ["The PLAN Held a Special Meeting to Analyze Flight Safety Issues"], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 12 September 2014, p. 1; 邹松林 [Zou Songlin] and 梁庆松 [Liang Qingsong], 海军召开飞行训练工作总结电视电话会议 ["The PLAN Held a Teleconference to Summarize Its Flight Training Work"], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 31 December 2015, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> 李高健 [Li Gaojian], 刘征鲁 [Liu Zhenglu], 吴胜利刘晓江看望小朋友 ["Wu Shengli and Liu Xiaojiang Visit Children"], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 3 June 2014, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> 王一 [Wang Yi], 周启青 [Zhou Qiqing], "海军组织年度训练第二季度集中授课" [The Navy Organized Concentrated Training Sessions for the Second Quarter of the Year], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 27 June 2014, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the last of these experiences, in November 2015, PLAN Commander ADM Wu Shengli (吴胜利) received ADM Scott Swift, Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, in Beijing. The meeting covered a range of U.S.-China and navy-to-navy topics, including freedom of navigation operations and sovereignty issues in the South China Sea, as well as implementing the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea. Cui also attended this meeting; 任晓航 [Ren Xiaohang] and 蒲海洋 [Pu Haiyang], 吴胜利会见美海军太平洋舰队司令 ["Wu Shengli Meets with the U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander"], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 20 November 2015, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> "Rear Admiral Cui Yuzhong, Deputy Commander of East Sea Fleet (also Commander of East Sea Fleet Aviation), Chinese PLA Navy," biography from Galle Dialogue 2017 International Maritime Conference, *Galle Dialogue*, 9-10 October 2017,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015928/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD\\_2017/research\\_papers/cv/rear\\_admiral\\_cui\\_yuzhong\\_cv.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015928/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD_2017/research_papers/cv/rear_admiral_cui_yuzhong_cv.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> 中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会代表名单 ["List of Delegates to the CCP's 19th National Congress"], 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 29 September 2017,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20171013111616/https://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-09/29/c\\_1121747855.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20171013111616/https://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-09/29/c_1121747855.htm).

<sup>21</sup> Not all PLAN flag officers serve in the NPC, although being on it is generally a good sign for one's career prospects.

<sup>22</sup> "Galle Dialogue: International Maritime Conference," *Galle Dialogue*, Accessed 9 February 2026,

<https://galledialogue.lk/index.php?id=3>.

<sup>23</sup> Cui Yuzhong, "Building a Community of Shared Future for Mankind and Pragmatically Enhancing Maritime Security Cooperation," conference paper from Galle Dialogue 2017 International Maritime Conference, *Galle Dialogue*, 9-10 October 2017,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20260113020210/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD\\_2017/research\\_papers/pdf/rear\\_admiral\\_cui\\_yuzhong.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20260113020210/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD_2017/research_papers/pdf/rear_admiral_cui_yuzhong.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Cui Yuzhong, "Building a Community of Shared Future for Mankind and Pragmatically Enhancing Maritime Security Cooperation," slide deck from Galle Dialogue 2017 International Maritime Conference, *Galle Dialogue*, 9-10 October 2017,



Figure 2: RADM Cui presents at “Galle Dialogue-2017” in Colombo, Sri Lanka.<sup>25</sup>

Cui next appeared publicly in March 2021, in a leadership billet in the Eastern Theater Command (based on his seating position, chest badge, and arm patch), having been promoted to VADM.<sup>26</sup> This is the first observation of Cui serving in a joint billet.



Figure 3: VADM Cui (circled in red) attends a lecture on Party history. Note Wang Xiubin (王秀斌) and He Weidong (何卫东) sitting at the same table. Both Wang and He were removed for disciplinary violations and corruption in October 2025.<sup>27</sup>

[https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015632/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD\\_2017/research\\_papers/ppt/rear\\_admiral\\_cui\\_yuzhong\\_ppt.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20260113015632/https://galledialogue.lk/assets/template/images/GD_2017/research_papers/ppt/rear_admiral_cui_yuzhong_ppt.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> “Galle Dialogue – 2017,” *Galle Dialogue*, 9-10 October 2017,

<https://galledialogue.lk/assets/images/Gallery/2017/welcome/8.jpg>.

<sup>26</sup> [军事报道]全军党史学习教育宣讲团继续展开专题宣讲 [“[Military Report] The All-Military Party History Study and Education Lecture Group Continues to Give Special Lectures”], *CCTV-7*, 26 March 2021, <https://tv.cctv.com/2021/03/26/VIDE0f9D47oKCmuYR2vQieN210326.shtml>.

<sup>27</sup> 刘上靖 [Liu Shangjing], 张又侠、刘振立涉嫌严重违纪违法被立案审查调查 [“Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli are Under Investigation for Suspected Serious Disciplinary and Legal Violations”], 中华人民共和国国防部 [PRC Ministry of National Defense], 24 January 2026, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/16439106.html>.

Around 12 July 2021, Cui moved back to Beijing. The PLAN's official newspaper identified him as a member of the PLA Navy Party Standing Committee, which is the highest CCP organization in the PLA Navy—a topic covered in *CMSI Note* 16.<sup>28</sup> The 20 July 2021 issue of *People's Navy* confirmed his billet as Deputy Commander,<sup>29</sup> which is a theater command deputy leader grade billet.<sup>30</sup> This indicates that Cui also was promoted to Deputy Commander, PLA Navy around or before 12 July 2021.

In his tenure as PLA Navy Deputy Commander, Cui attended a variety of meetings and events that are required of a service deputy commander, including numerous PSC meetings on political issues, as well as issues that Cui had worked on previously, including safety management work<sup>31</sup> and modern military material logistics and modern asset management.<sup>32</sup> Cui also continued to weigh in on naval aviation matters. In September 2022, he spoke at the “Naval Aviation Development Forum” (“海军航空兵发展论坛”) in Qingdao. In his speech, Cui emphasized the necessity to hone the ability to fight and win battles whenever called upon to do so by Commander-in-Chief Xi and to continuously improve operational capabilities.<sup>33</sup> In November 2022, Cui visited the 14<sup>th</sup> Airshow China (中国航展) in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, where he was able to chat with representatives and observe the latest equipment and technologies from numerous aviation enterprises.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 杨涛 [Yang Tao], 王庆厚 [Wang Qinghou], 海军党委理论学习中心组组织集体学习研讨 深入学习贯彻习主席“七一”重要讲话精神 以实际行动和优异成绩努力为党和人民争取更大光荣 [“The Navy Party Committee Theoretical Learning Center Group Organized a Collective Study and Discussion Session to Thoroughly Study and Implement the Spirit of Chairman Xi Jinping's Important July 1<sup>st</sup> speech, Striving to Win Greater Glory for the Party and the People Through Concrete Actions and Outstanding Achievements”], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 12 July 2021, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> 杨涛 [Yang Tao], 薛飞 [Xue Fei], 任天然 [Ren Tianran], 全军党史学习教育宣讲团到海军机关作专题宣讲 [“The PLA Party History Study and Education Lecture Group Gives a Special Lecture at PLA Navy Headquarters”], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 20 July 2021, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> TextOre, *Directory of PRC Military Leadership*, March 2025, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> 王元靖 [Wang Yuanjing], 王力飞 [Wang Lifei], 海军召开安全管理工作电视电话会议 [“The PLA Navy Held a Videoconference on Safety Management”], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 8 November 2021, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> 殷杰 [Yin Jie], 肖勇利 [Xiao Yongli], 海军现代军事物流体系和现代资产管理体系建设推进电视电话会议强调 对东海军“两大体系”建设高起点展开高标准落实 [“A Teleconference on Advancing the Construction of the PLAN's Modern Military Logistics System and Modern Asset Management System Emphasized that the Building of the Eastern Theater Command Navy's ‘Two Major System-of-Systems’ Should be Carried out at a High Starting Point and Implemented to a High Standard”], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 27 September 2021, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> 聂保胜 [Nie Baosheng], 王庆厚 [Wang Qinghou], 徐正轩 [Xu Zhengxuan], “海军航空兵发展论坛”在青岛举行 [“The Naval Aviation Development Forum Took Place in Qingdao”], 人民海军 [People's Navy], 8 September 2022, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> 第十四届中国航展正式开幕, 中国航发展台令人瞩目 [“The 14<sup>th</sup> Airshow China has Officially Opened, and the Aero Engine Corporation of China Booth is Attracting Much Attention”], 中国航空发动机研究院 [China Aero Engine Research Institute], WeChat, 10 November 2022, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?\\_\\_biz=MzUyMTAzODUxMQ==&mid=2247495985&idx=2&sn=1ad4b2d93094b166f75214832c35a501&chksm=f9e38ef1ce9407e7b9e3019ed95fc0ddfa22ac3ca2afe62ddd74387327f0bba666d107a04520&scene=27](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzUyMTAzODUxMQ==&mid=2247495985&idx=2&sn=1ad4b2d93094b166f75214832c35a501&chksm=f9e38ef1ce9407e7b9e3019ed95fc0ddfa22ac3ca2afe62ddd74387327f0bba666d107a04520&scene=27).



Figure 4: VADM Cui (wearing a red ID badge) visits the Aero Engine Corporation of China's display at the 14th Airshow China.

As a loyal CCP member in a senior-grade billet, Cui was also given other political roles. In October 2022, Cui was elected as an Alternate Member to the CCP's 20<sup>th</sup> CC.<sup>35</sup> Alternate Members are standby personnel who fill vacated posts within the CCP-CC when its Full Members can no longer serve. PLA officers who serve as Alternate Members often receive grade and rank promotions later in their careers. One month later, Cui was announced as a member of former paramount leader Jiang Zemin's (江泽民) Funeral Committee.<sup>36</sup> Political positions like these indicate further trust and show steady political growth.

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<sup>35</sup> 十九大受权发布: 中国共产党第十九届中央委员会候补委员名单 [“The 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress Official Release: List of Alternate Members of the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP-CC”], 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 24 October 2017, [https://web.archive.org/web/20201104162939/http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpnc/2017-10/24/c\\_1121848883.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104162939/http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpnc/2017-10/24/c_1121848883.htm); 中国共产党第二十届中央委员会候补委员名单 [“List of Alternate Members of the CCP's 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee”], 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 22 October 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20221022091652/http://www.news.cn/2022-10/22/c\\_1129075009.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20221022091652/http://www.news.cn/2022-10/22/c_1129075009.htm).

<sup>36</sup> 江泽民同志治丧委员会名单 [“List of Members of the Jiang Zemin Funeral Committee”], 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 30 November 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20221130102545/http://www.news.cn/2022-11/30/c\\_1129174033.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20221130102545/http://www.news.cn/2022-11/30/c_1129174033.htm).

As a deputy commander, Cui was in a better position to meet with foreign counterparts than ever before. In September 2025, VADM Cui received a Myanmar Tatmadaw (Navy) delegation led by Commander-in-Chief (Navy) Admiral Htein Win in Beijing. Typically, the PLAN Commander is the one who receives other navies' commanders, but in this case, Hu Zhongming was not present—it was Cui who did the honors. During the visit, Admiral Htein Win reviewed a PLAN Honor Guard and the two sides had a meeting on cooperation and training between the two navies. Admiral Htein Win also visited the Northern Theater Command Navy destroyer *Xining* (西宁舰) and the Naval Submarine Academy (海军潜艇学院) in Qingdao, Shandong province.<sup>37</sup> This may have been the first clear indication that Cui was slated for a higher grade.



Figure 5: VADM Cui (left) and Commander-in-Chief (Navy) Admiral Htein Win of Myanmar (right) review the PLA Navy Honor Guard in Beijing.

In October 2025, Cui attended the 20<sup>th</sup> CCP-Central Committee's (CC) Fourth Plenary Session in Beijing. In a contemporaneous interview with China Central Television (CCTV), Cui lauded the CCP-CC's leadership and highlighted the substantial advances made by the People's Navy under Chairman Xi policy guidance.<sup>38</sup> Within China's party-state-military system, such high-profile appearances often serve as signals of impending or recent personnel developments—suggesting that Cui's visibility at this event may be more than routine.

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<sup>37</sup> "Goodwill Visit to PRC: C-in-C (Navy) paid goodwill visit to PRC," MITV, 22 September 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20260120020755/https://www.myanmaritv.com/news/goodwill-visit-prc-c-c-navy-paid-goodwill-visit-prc>; "Commander-in-Chief (Navy)-led delegation visits naval HQs, landmarks in China," *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 22 September 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250922073721/https://www.gnlm.com.mm/commander-in-chief-navy-led-delegation-visits-naval-hqs-landmarks-in-china/>.

<sup>38</sup> 中国共产党第二十届中央委员会第四次全体会议公报 ["Commiqué of the 20<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee's Fourth Plenary Session"], 「新闻联播」[News Broadcast], CCTV, 23 October 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0j6Dh\\_Ou8&t=1840s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0j6Dh_Ou8&t=1840s).



Figure 6: VADM Cui Speaks on the PLAN's Importance and Improvements Under the CCP-CC's Leadership.

### Conclusions: An Apparent Heir, Under a Shadow:

As of this writing, ADM Hu Zhongming is still the PLAN Commander. However, his last public appearance occurred nine months ago, back in May 2025, when he received a Royal Thai Navy delegation led by the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Navy, ADM Chiraphol Wongwit.<sup>39</sup> Since then, Hu has disappeared from public view and Cui appears to have stepped up and represented the PLAN at important and major functions as early as September the same year.

If Hu were to be removed from the PLAN's senior-most billet, Cui appears to be an excellent candidate for the top job of PLAN Commander for several reasons: (1) a review of the biographies of the other PLAN Deputy Commanders who sit on the PLAN Party Standing Committee (as of 6 January 2025)<sup>40</sup> reveals that Cui is the only one who is a (former) naval aviator—this gives him a relative advantage and allows him to bring a different perspective in the “era of three aircraft carriers;” (2) he appears to be a loyal CCP member and has served in several important political bodies; and (3) his years of service across the North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet, PLAN headquarters, and a joint billet in the Eastern Theater Command allowed him to gain a wide scope of knowledge about the PLAN's operations at the tactical, regional, and strategic levels.

<sup>39</sup> ผู้บัญชาการทหารเรือเดินทางเยือนกองทัพเรือสาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีนอย่างเป็นทางการ ในฐานะแขกคนสำคัญ [“The Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Navy Paid an Official Visit to the People's Republic of China Navy as a Distinguished Guest”], กองทัพเรือไทย [Royal Thai Navy], 13 May 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20260218015157/https://www.navy.mi.th/index.php/9zy6pgluimp6>.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, “Confirmed: ADM Yuan Huazhi Removed as the PLAN's Political Commissar,” *CMSI Note* 16 (Newport, RI: Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 4 September 2025), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/16/>.

However, there are reasons to be circumspect about Cui's potential selection to serve as the next PLAN Commander. The *PLA Daily* (解放军报) editorial published immediately after the PRC Ministry of National Defense (国防部) announced investigations into CMC Vice Chairman, General (GEN) Zhang Youxia (张又侠) and CMC Joint Staff Department Chief, GEN Liu Zhenli (刘振立)<sup>41</sup> proclaims that “the current concentrated crackdown on corruption is not a case of becoming more corrupt as we fight it, but rather [the more we fight against corruption], the deeper the corruption is revealed to be.”<sup>42</sup> This quote reveals that, though the fight against corruption resulted in investigations into the senior-most PLA officers, this fight is nowhere near concluding; rather, investigators have started looking into wrongdoing amongst officers with lower grades and ranks. Given that two former PLAN three-star admirals, CMC Political Work Department Director Miao Hua (苗华) and PLAN Political Commissar Yuan Huazhi (袁华智), were removed for graft—and both were responsible for reviewing and approving promotions (which was often a source of corruption)—there remains a real possibility that more officers, including Cui, may have been pulled into the most recent round of investigations. Only time will tell if this previous association with Miao or Yuan will affect Cui's career. In a time when nobody appears truly safe, Cui is clearly one to watch.

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<sup>41</sup> 刘上靖 [Liu Shangjing], 张又侠、刘振立涉嫌严重违纪违法被立案审查调查 [“Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli are Under Investigation for Suspected Serious Disciplinary and Legal Violations”], 中华人民共和国国防部 [PRC Ministry of National Defense], 24 January 2026, <https://web.archive.org/web/20260128175950/http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/16439106.html>.

<sup>42</sup> 坚决打赢军队反腐败斗争攻坚战持久战总体战 [“Resolutely Win the Battle, Protracted War, and Overall War Against Corruption in the Military”], 解放军报 [*PLA Daily*], 25 January 2026, [https://web.archive.org/web/20260126120653/http://www.81.cn/szb\\_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfb&paperDate=2026-01-25&paperNumber=01&articleid=971641](https://web.archive.org/web/20260126120653/http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfb&paperDate=2026-01-25&paperNumber=01&articleid=971641).