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Xi Jinping Is Purging the Chinese Military

SEVERAL REPORTS IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE CALLED ATTENTION to Chinese President Xi Jinping purging his nation's military and have speculated about what it means for China and the world.

National Interest chimed in earlier this month with some compelling analysis. The authors say “Xi is reviving Maoist-style tactics.”

Veteran China watchers ... have paid ... close attention to Xi's establishment of the [People's Liberation Army] PLA Strategic Support Force Analysts have also pondered questions such as the future membership of the CMC and how cooperative the traditionally army-dominated top levels of the PLA's leadership will become under the reforms. ...

[I]t is also necessary to consider the broader implications of Xi's apparent relationship with the military. Many observers have stated the obvious: Xi is as “large and in charge” in military circles as he is in Chinese politics generally. This is true, but his control over the PLA deserves more attention than it has received. ...

Xi is reviving Maoist-style tactics including purges of corrupt officers, forced public displays of respect for Mao and support of Maoist thinking, and a formidable inter-

will have profound implications for civilian-military relations in China. ...

Part of Xi's “China Dream” is to produce a strong military capable of deterring or, if necessary, taking on powerful potential adversaries including even the United States. Xi seems intent on keeping his anticorruption campaign and homage to Mao severely circumscribed, to focus on combating the problem of corruption and rooting out any disloyalty or opposition to reform within the ranks. Mao, on the other hand, sought ideological purity as defined by him at the expense of PLA modernization and professionalization efforts.

To date, there is no evidence that Xi is considering this path. In fact, his military reforms suggest quite the opposite: Xi wants a PLA that demonstrates utmost loyalty to the party, but he also wants a far more competent and operationally capable PLA by 2020—one that is commensurate with China's status as a major world power and capable of protecting China's regional and global interests.

Xi's ambition and his mirroring of Mao is cause for concern. In the name of ideology, Chairman Mao was responsible for the murder of more people than Hitler or Stalin. Under his reign,

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