

War hero promoted to PLA's chief of staff

China has appointed a war hero as chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army, according to the Defense Ministry.

General Li Zuocheng, 63, a native of Hunan province, met top-ranking military officers of Pakistan and Afghanistan over the weekend in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, in his new capacity as chief of the PLA Joint Staff Department, a news release from the ministry said.

This means Li, who was commander of the PLA Ground Force, is slated to become a member of the Central Military Commission, the top military ruling body in China, with President Xi Jinping as its chairman, because all of Li's predecessors were included in the commission after they became the PLA's chief of staff.

It remains unknown when Li received his new appointment, as the PLA does not publish detailed information about its personnel reshuffles.

However, the move had to be within this past week because General Fang Fenghui, Li's predecessor, was reported to have had talks with a top Thai military commander on Aug 21 in Beijing.

Fang was named chief of staff of the PLA in October 2012. After transferring the post to Li, he remains a member of the Central Military Commission.

Born in October 1953, Li joined the PLA Ground Force in 1970. He became nationally known in 1979 after he led his company to victory through a fierce battle that lasted 26 consecutive days during Sino-Vietnamese border conflicts that year. Li later was awarded the title "Combat Hero" for his command of the company and the fact he remained at the front line of the battle despite multiple injuries.

After the war, he continued to move up through the ranks. In 1997, Li was promoted to major general. In 2009, he was advanced to lieutenant general in the office of the deputy chief of the former Chengdu Military Command. In 2013, he was named chief of the command. Two years later, he was given the PLA's top rank—general—and was appointed as the first commander of the PLA Ground Force Headquarters, which was established on the last day of 2015.

The last time Li appeared in news reports as the Ground Force commander was on July 31, when he signed a letter to members of the service to mark PLA Day on Aug 1.