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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

06 May 1987

**China's Yang Shangkun: Growing Influence** [redacted]

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**Summary**

We believe Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping sanctioned Yang Shangkun's visit to the United States during a period of domestic political tensions in part to boost the visibility and status of one of his most powerful allies. Deng also probably wants to emphasize the importance and continuity of the Sino-US relationship, not only in military areas but across the board. We therefore expect Yang to be nonconfrontational in most meetings, although he may raise standard Chinese complaints about Taiwan, technology transfer, and trade for domestic political reasons. At the same time, he may probe US willingness to sell air-to-air missiles to China. [redacted]

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\_\_\_\_\_ This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 6 May 1987 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Political Assessments Branch, China Division, OEA [redacted]

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**Yang's Role in Chinese Politics**

Yang Shangkun, one of Deng Xiaoping's key supporters since returning from Cultural Revolution exile in 1978, has been Deng's point man in the difficult and politically sensitive process of reforming the People's Liberation Army (PLA).<sup>1</sup> Yang also is one of a small group of revolutionary founding fathers on whom Deng leans for advice in crises. The recent removal of Hu Yaobang as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party--which Yang helped engineer--has boosted Yang's already considerable influence. [redacted] that since Hu's fall Yang has assumed increased responsibilities, especially in domestic matters. [redacted]

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Both the timing of the visit (15-27 May) and the high-level reception the Chinese have requested suggest that the underlying purpose of the trip is to enhance Yang's credentials as an important political leader with broad responsibilities. We expect Yang will be a key figure in this summer's wrangling over the agenda of the 13th Party Congress scheduled for fall; we also expect Yang to assume greater authority at the conclave. Chinese officials have hinted to US diplomats and [redacted] may be promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee; he may also replace Deng as head of the party's Military Affairs Commission.<sup>2</sup> Elevating Yang to the Standing Committee would give Deng a reliable ally on China's most important policy body at a time when Deng is under pressure from other party elders and new power arrangements are taking shape. [redacted]

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Premier and Acting General Secretary Zhao Ziyang also stands to gain if Yang makes the transition from military leader with behind-the-scenes influence to Standing Committee status. Yang is one of the few military leaders to whom Zhao appears to have ties. When Yang was number-two man in Guangdong Province, he relied heavily on proteges of Zhao Ziyang--once party chief in Guangdong--to carry out reformist policies. [redacted] Yang's support of the decision to oust Hu and appoint Zhao was a key factor in the move, according to a variety of evidence, and he has faithfully toed Zhao's line since January, while other leaders have demonstrated their independence by slight but politically symbolic deviations. We believe Yang's support for Zhao will be an important factor in the political infighting we expect during the next few months. [redacted]

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<sup>1</sup> Although Yang has become known under Deng as a military leader, [redacted] [redacted] Before 1949, Yang held several military posts but he concentrated on political work. Yang does not have combat or line officer experience. After 1949, Yang held a succession of party jobs until the Cultural Revolution. Since Deng's return to power, Yang has emerged as a leader on the Military Affairs Commission, the party's top military policy making body. He has focused on military politics and reform issues such as reducing the size of the PLA and upgrading training. [redacted]

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Chinese Constitution, the MAC chairman is automatically a Standing Committee member. [redacted]

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**The Bilateral Angle--What Does China Want?**

In our estimation, China has no new foreign or strategic policy goals for the visit. We believe Beijing wants instead to demonstrate that, despite recent political upheavals in China, the Sino-US relationship is still on track. Beijing probably also sees the trip as an opportunity to introduce an increasingly powerful Chinese leader to the United States and to a range of US policymakers. Yang has traveled little--to our knowledge, he has visited only the Soviet Union, North Korea, and the Philippines--and the only top-level US official he has met is the Secretary of Defense. Firsthand knowledge of the West, and especially his meetings with important Western policymakers, will strengthen Yang's leadership credentials and give him greater depth for his new, broader responsibilities.

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Yang may carefully surface Chinese interest in US radar-guided missiles in meetings with senior military officials. Air Force Commander Wang Hai stated during his recent visit to Washington that Beijing's negotiations with Italy for the 57-kilometer-range Aspide missile have foundered. The Chinese, in our view, need such a missile for the F-8-2 fighters being upgraded with US avionics to markedly improve their air-to-air defense capability in the next decade. Yang may therefore probe to see if the United States will sell Sparrow-class (AIM-7) missiles compatible with US avionics.

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Yang may also harbor some suspicions about US motives in pursuing a relationship with China. Although he has generally promoted the growth of Sino-US cooperation, on one occasion Yang complained that the United States only wants to keep China and the Soviet Union apart, and has no real interest in a stronger China. However, in keeping with his prudent style, he has not, to our knowledge, tried to obstruct Deng's policy of increased cooperation with the United States. In fact, both in public statements and in private talks with US officials, Yang has pressed for freer military exchanges between the United States and China. In particular, he has supported allowing US specialists in training and military education greater access to Chinese facilities, reversing a longtime PLA stand.

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We have no indications that Yang is coming with a special message, but we believe whatever he says can be treated as authoritative. In our judgment Yang, unlike Hu Yaobang, is unlikely to take positions that do not have the weight of leadership consensus--at least of Deng and his supporters--behind them.

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If Yang does choose to take a hard line in any of his meetings, it will most likely be for domestic political purposes. With an eye on the congress and preparatory meetings, Yang may believe he needs to make a bow to the concerns of some traditionalist party elders who believe Beijing has been too soft on the United States. He may also wish to demonstrate his "Chineseness" at a time when many are under attack for worshipping the West. Therefore it is possible that Yang may criticize aspects of US policy in public statements.

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In our opinion, the most likely issue he will raise is Taiwan, although he may also complain about US and COCOM controls on technology transfer and bilateral trade

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issues, as other Chinese leaders recently have. We believe Taiwan is a likely choice because it is the safest and least controversial among the Chinese leadership, and because Taiwan policy is one of Yang's responsibilities. [REDACTED]

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### **Yang's Prospects**

It is a peculiarity of Chinese politics that the 79-year-old Yang may be about to join the front ranks of Chinese leadership. Although Yang is an able and respected leader, his principal political strengths, in our view, are his solid loyalty to Deng Xiaoping and his firm adherence to "democratic centralism." Yang may oppose Deng's plans on occasion, but once a decision has been made Yang supports it and works to implement it. One consequence of this is that we know relatively little of Yang's policy preferences. Like Zhao Ziyang, he is close-mouthed in private discussions and generally sticks with the party line in public. [REDACTED]

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Although loyal to Deng, Yang is not without political ambitions. According to press reports, Yang originally opposed Deng's attempts to move Hu Yaobang to the MAC chairmanship. In our view, this was not only because Yang shared the military's dislike for Hu, but also because he wants the job himself. [REDACTED]

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In any case, Chinese officials have stressed to US diplomats that Yang is now the top day-to-day military leader. We believe that Yang will be one of the major players in arranging the post-Deng succession. The MAC chairmanship and the Standing Committee Seat would not only constitute recognition of his status, it would position Yang as a contender for Deng's unofficial position as senior statesman were he to outlive Deng. [REDACTED]

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