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Transforming China's National Security Architecture in the Xi Era

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Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

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Executive Summary: This testimony reviews the transformation of key elements of China's national security system during the Xi Jinping era and previews potential changes at the 20th Party Congress. It is organized into three sections: major Xi-era reforms, focusing on the National Security Commission system, the PLA and paramilitary services, and the public security apparatus; drivers of change; and challenges and future prospects. It closes with recommendations for Congress and the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Key findings include:

- Xi has innovated a new means of supervision and control of national security work through the National Security Commission system. This now includes "NSCs" at each tier of the party hierarchy down to the county level.
- The PLA and the People's Armed Police have undergone dramatic structural reforms over the last five years, including changes that strengthen to Xi's ability to manage and coordinate the bureaucracy.
- Organizational changes improved Xi's authority over the national security system by adding authority to offices under his control and diminishing rival power centers. This accompanied other changes, including corruption investigations and personnel shifts.
- Reforms also continued a general transition of power in the Xi era from the state to the Chinese Communist Party. A final important goal was improving the operational effectiveness of the PLA and paramilitary services.
- Potential challenges include the durability of the current architecture in the post-Xi era, Xi's ability to rein in the bureaucracy, tradeoffs between political and professional qualifications, a blurred division of labor between different commissions under the CCP Central Committee, and limited national security representation on the Politburo.
- The 20th Party Congress will clarify not only the new slate of national security officials but also provide insight into Xi's priorities and how the party is structured to manage the national security system.
- Congress and the USCC have opportunities to support open-source analysis of China, require additional administration reporting on related topics, and commission analysis on understudied but critical topics, including China's NSC and emergency planning systems.

Major Reforms in the Xi Era

Over the last decade, Xi Jinping has led and, in many cases, innovated or reformed a vast national security decision-making and implementation apparatus. The boundaries of this system are ambiguous because the concept of “national security” has expanded under Xi, from traditional security issues such as territorial defense and internal stability to other areas of governance, including food security, epidemic control, cyber security, and public finance. Xi labeled this broader approach the “holistic national security concept” (总体国家安全观).¹ As a result, most party and state organs now support some aspect of China’s “national security” work.² This section, however, focuses on high-level decision-making systems and organizational changes directly affecting the primary coercive tools of power.

National Security Commission System

From the perspective of national security decision-making and coordination, one of the most notable changes during the Xi era has been the creation of a system of National Security Commissions (国家安全委员会). The party established a National Security Commission, later renamed the Central National Security Commission (CNSC), at the 3rd Plenum of the 18th Central Committee in November 2013 that would “perfect the national security system (国家安全体制) and strategy and ensure national security.”³ Its inclusion in a section of the plenum decision focused on social governance led Chinese and foreign observers to speculate that the commission would focus primarily on domestic affairs.⁴

Only a few authoritative details about the CNSC have emerged. In January 2014, the Politburo clarified that the CNSC would be the Central Committee’s “deliberative and decision-making coordination agency” (决策和议事协调机构) for national security affairs and responsible to the Politburo and its Standing Committee.⁵ It would be chaired by Xi, with its vice chairmen the party’s second- and third-ranking members, premier Li Keqiang and NPC chairman Zhang Dejiang (replaced by Li Zhanshu in March 2018). Its first meeting was held in April 2014, during which Xi introduced the “holistic national security concept.”⁶ CNSC meetings are not usually publicized, but a second meeting was announced in April 2018, at which Xi said that the CNSC should “do a good job in implementing national security guidelines and policies and improve the national security mechanism.”⁷ Other details, including its full membership, internal structure, decision-making processes and staffing, have not been released.

What has been clearer since the 19th Party Congress is the creation of a broader set of National Security Commissions below the CNSC. Party committees at the provincial, prefecture, municipal, and county levels now all have “NSCs” built into their internal structure, led by the party secretary and staffed by the party office.⁸ Information from local party and government sources suggests that these lower-level NSCs meet two or three times per year to review decisions made by higher-level NSCs, discuss pressing “national security” matters (including diverse topics under Xi’s expanded concept of national security, such as food security and public health), and listen to reports from relevant agencies. The party has thus established a new system of supervision and coordination extending from Xi in his role as CNSC chairman to the localities, becoming the organizational face of the party’s “holistic national security concept.”

People's Liberation Army

The 2-million-strong People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to be led by the Central Military Commission (CMC), with Xi as its chairman, supported by two uniformed vice chairmen. Like the CNSC, the CMC is a constituent part of the CCP Central Committee, but in practice it wields significant autonomy over military policy, rendering decisions on acquisition, force structure, operations, and other areas.⁹ The structure of the CMC has been revised many times since the 1920s.¹⁰ The 19th Party Congress resulted in its downsizing from eleven to seven members.¹¹ The directors of the former general logistics and armament departments were removed, as were the service chiefs,¹² though the secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission—responsible for anti-graft investigations within the armed forces—was added. This was a notable change that indicated Xi's priority on rooting out corruption.

Structurally, the PLA has undergone extensive reforms under Xi, including a 300,000-person downsizing, creation of a modern joint command system, and establishment of the Strategic Support and Joint Logistic Support forces.¹³ The restructuring of the CMC bureaucracy in January 2016 was particularly relevant for political control. The four general departments, which had become semi-autonomous fiefdoms under Xi's predecessors, were replaced by 15 departments, commissions, and offices.¹⁴ For instance, the Discipline Inspection and Political and Legal Affairs commissions were removed from the former General Political Department, while the Audit Office was removed from the former General Logistics Department.¹⁵ These agencies now report directly to the CMC, thus enabling Xi and his CMC colleagues to monitor and control the PLA through multiple independent channels.¹⁶

People's Armed Police

The People's Armed Police (PAP), consisting of 500,000 to 1 million personnel, is part of China's broader "armed forces" (武装力量) that also includes the PLA and the militia, but focuses more on internal security.¹⁷ Prior to 2017, the PAP operated under a dual leadership system in which both the CMC and the State Council played a role. In practice, local government and party leaders occasionally summoned PAP units to stifle protests. To prevent overuse or abuse of the PAP, the 2009 PAP Law confined local mobilization of the armed police to certain particularly severe incidents, including "riots, turbulence, severe violent crimes, terrorist attacks, and other social security incidents," and stated that only public security organs above the county level could take command of PAP units.¹⁸

Control over the PAP has been further tightened during the Xi era. On January 1, 2018, the CCP Central Committee abandoned the dual leadership system and full control over the PAP was granted to the CMC.¹⁹ Local officials can still request PAP support through a new "mission request and work coordination mechanism" (任务需求和工作协调机制). Details from emergency response plans (应急计划) issued by local governments between 2019 and 2021 suggest that the PAP continues to play a predefined role in local emergency response, including handling protests, and that support can be requested directly from PAP units at the same administrative level.²⁰ In June 2020, the National People's Congress approved an updated PAP Law that formalized the new arrangement, but added that the PAP could begin to mobilize to handle emergency incidents even before the full approval process has been completed, signaling a recognition that timely crisis response is critical.²¹

Changing command arrangements were only one feature of a broader reform of the PAP that strengthened its identity as a paramilitary service.²² Prior to the Xi era, the PAP contained not only internal security troops (内卫部队), but also ancillary forces such as the Hydropower Force, Gold Force, and Firefighting Force. In 2017, the PAP divested itself of those forces and strengthened its focus on internal security by adding two “mobile contingents” (机动总队), one based in the north and one in the south, containing specialized capabilities such as special operations troops and capable of projecting power at great distances.²³ The PAP also gained control over the China Coast Guard, which was previously subordinate to the State Oceanic Administration.²⁴ In his role as CMC chairman, Xi thus has at his disposal a reformed and more tightly focused paramilitary service.

Legal and Public Security Organs

Another significant shift in the broader national security apparatus was the creation of a National Supervision Commission—also confusingly rendered as the “NSC”—as part of a reform of the State Council in March 2018.²⁵ This new commission, part of the state administration, was integrated with the party’s existing Central Commission on Discipline Inspection, essentially expanding the CCP’s anti-corruption arm to cover civil servants and employees of state-owned enterprises. With powers such as the ability to detain suspects for up to six months without the right to consult a lawyer, this system provides CCP leaders an “extra-legal” cudgel to intimidate members of society beyond the party.

The public security system has also been evolving. The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) continues to supervise local police forces among other responsibilities, including border control. In recent years, China’s police have conducted armed patrols and have increasingly advanced capabilities at their disposal, such as SWAT teams and “smart city” surveillance systems.²⁶ The Ministry of State Security (MSS) focuses on counterintelligence work within and beyond China.²⁷ Coordinating the work of both ministries is the CCP Central Committee’s Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission. As Minxin Pei explains, the commission’s mandate includes generating policy proposals, supervising implementation of the party’s internal security agenda, and ensuring political loyalty among public security officials.²⁸

Drivers of Change

The evolution of China’s national security architecture appears to have been designed, in part, to centralize authority over key coercive tools under Xi. But at least two broader goals are also apparent: contributing to a process of transferring authority from state to party organs and increasing China’s ability to prevent, plan for, and respond to crises. This section describes all three motives.

Centralizing Control under Xi

Reforms improved Xi’s influence by consolidating authority in offices held by him and diminishing other power centers. His position as CNSC chairman allows him to set the agenda for national security work and ensures that his priorities are widely communicated across the party hierarchy.²⁹ The revised CMC bureaucracy increased Xi’s ability to monitor the bureaucracy by establishing several mutually independent reporting chains culminating with Xi and eliminating the general departments, which had become hotbeds of corruption.³⁰ The ending of the dual leadership system over the PAP reduced the ability of provincial officials to cultivate influence with provincial PAP units—recall Bo Xilai’s mobilization of the PAP to apprehend his former police chief Wang Lijun in February 2012. Xi did not assume authority of the Central Political and Legal Affairs

Commission but reduced its influence by downgrading its leader from a Politburo Standing Committee to a Politburo member.

Other steps to increase Xi's power have complemented these structural reforms, including:

- *Enhancing Xi's personal prestige in the security services.* Xi has appeared at military events at a higher rate than Hu Jintao and has cultivated his authority through a political work campaign highlighting the "CMC chairman responsibility system" (军委主席责任制)—the message being that ultimate power rests with Xi as CMC chairman, and not with other civilians or the uniformed vice chairmen who wielded significant power under his predecessors.³¹ His writings have also become required reading for military officers.³²
- *Leveraging anti-corruption investigations against rivals.* Xi's use of anti-corruption investigations to remove or intimidate his rivals includes purging Zhou Yongkang, who previously led the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, and former CMC vice chairmen Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, both appointed by Jiang Zemin. Other cases, such as the arrest of former MPS vice minister Sun Lijun in April 2020 and the investigation of another former vice minister, Fu Zhenghua, in October 2021, sent the message that no one, including close Xi associates, is immune, thus giving Xi a powerful tool to rein in the military and security services.³³
- *Installing associates in key positions.* Like his predecessors, Xi has placed trusted associates in key positions. Zhang Youxia, who serves as a CMC vice chairman, has known Xi since childhood and others, such as Li Zhanshu and current MPS party secretary Wang Xiaohong, have known Xi professionally for decades.³⁴ Xi has also appointed longtime aides to key staff positions, including Zhong Shaojun, who was an aide to Xi in Zhejiang Province prior to being appointed as deputy director of the CMC General Office, and Ding Xuexiang, director of the CNSC General Office.³⁵ Such officials not only serve as "gatekeepers" to Xi, but also as his "eyes and ears" in bureaucracies far too large to be personally managed. Xi has also reportedly taken an active role in appointments to less-senior positions—as CMC chairman, he has reviewed personnel files for candidates down to Corps Commander.
- *Extending Xi's tenure.* Xi's broader consolidation of power in the party-state also includes the party's decision to eliminate term limits on the country's president in 2018 and its failure to appoint a successor-in-training at the 19th Party Congress.³⁶ One implication is that there is currently no civilian vice chairman of the CMC, meaning that Xi is unlikely to be seen as a "lame duck" within the PLA or other security organs.

Transferring Power to the Party

Another driver was strengthening the party's control over key decisions. In general, Xi has diagnosed an atrophying of the party as a threat to national development: only a strong party, in his analysis, can set and implement an agenda to correct economic and social problems, ensure the country's security from foreign and external threats, and set the stage for "national rejuvenation" by midcentury.³⁷ Various changes under Xi, including constitutional revisions, new or updated organizations, and personnel shifts, have been designed to strengthen the party, often at the expense of the state.³⁸

Several reforms of the national security architecture under Xi promoted this goal. The National Security Commission system established a new channel within the party to discuss national security issues and coordinate plans and policies down to the local level. The National Supervision Commission, though nominally a state entity, expands the party's anti-corruption authority through integration with the CCP discipline inspection system. The party has also solidified its grasp of the paramilitary services: the State Council, through the MPS, no longer oversees PAP operations, budgets, size, and composition,³⁹ and local public security departments relinquished a de facto ability to mobilize PAP units. The Coast Guard, as part of the PAP, is now responsible to the CMC, a party organ, rather than the state.

Other changes also supported a stronger role for the party. In terms of political work, Xi has repeatedly emphasized the “absolute leadership of the party over the armed forces” (党对人民军队的绝对领导) and the principle that the “party commands the gun.”⁴⁰ PLA political work has also emphasized revitalizing the party committee and commissar systems down to tactical units.⁴¹ In January 2021, the CMC approved new officer regulations that sought to “strengthen the key role of party organs in selecting and utilizing personnel” and that highlights “political standards” (政治标准) and “political quality” (政治品质) in promotions.⁴² It is likely that political qualifications have also been stressed in other parts of the system.

Improving Operational Effectiveness

A final important motive was increasing the operational effectiveness of the system. At the top, a major goal of the CNSC was to improve interagency coordination and information-sharing, which Chinese strategists believed was insufficient.⁴³ The need for a more effective coordination mechanism was recognized in the Jiang era, but resistance to more extensive reforms meant that the result was only a National Security Leading Small Group, which met on an ad-hoc basis and lacked a permanent staff. As a more powerful “commission,”⁴⁴ the CNSC holds regular meetings,⁴⁵ is chaired by Xi and coordinated by a trusted Xi aide (Politburo member Ding Xuexiang), and has staff drawn from across civilian and military agencies, which positions it to conduct strategic planning and coordinate crisis response more effectively.

Reforms to the military and paramilitary services also enhance operational performance. The PLA's updated command system enables a stronger integration of forces from the different services, improving PLA effectiveness in peacetime coercion and in preparations for war.⁴⁶ Similarly, the Strategic Support and Joint Logistic Support forces facilitate wartime operations by consolidating key support functions.⁴⁷ “Below-the-neck” changes included a transition from army (and some air force) divisions to brigades, which aimed to increase operational flexibility and maneuverability.⁴⁸ The PAP was also streamlined, retaining only those elements that contributed to its paramilitary identity, such as mobile rapid-reaction units, and divesting it of previous economic and law enforcement responsibilities. The addition of the mobile contingents, referenced above, also provided a powerful new operational tool.⁴⁹

Other changes improved the state's ability to handle crises and perform other functions. The March 2018 reform of the State Council consolidated functions from several other agencies into a new Ministry of Emergency Management (应急管理部) responsible for compiling emergency response plans, organizing rescue operations, workplace safety, and disaster prevention (including fires, floods, and earthquakes).⁵⁰ The reforms also brought border defense troops previously under the PAP and China's customs agency into a consolidated National Immigration Administration under the MPS.⁵¹

Challenges and Future Prospects

Despite Xi's reforms, China's national security system may still suffer several political and structural weaknesses. This section reviews those challenges and identifies how the party might try to address them at or beyond the 20th Party Congress.

First is whether a system that privileges the concentration of power in a single individual can survive in the post-Xi era. Recent reforms strengthened Xi's authority by ensuring his dominance of key institutions and diminishing rival power centers. While Xi has been able to marginalize his opponents through prosecutions and other means, it is less clear that such a system can be sustained after the next transition of power, since elites may prefer a return to collective decision-making due to the risks of policy failures or personal risk associated with strongman rule.⁵² Such a scenario is also likely if Xi becomes ill or leaves office without a strong successor being named; gaining the support of rival factions could mean that a compromise leader has less authority over the national security apparatus. Picking a successor at the 20th Party Congress would help ensure that the system outlives Xi's tenure, but could paradoxically reduce his power in office by empowering another individual.

Second are principal-agent problems. With vast responsibility over the national security and other arenas, Xi can only devote a small amount of time to ensure that any given set of policies are implemented. Appointment of trusted agents is one strategy for mitigating the risks of bureaucratic intransigence, but the reliability of those agents has been brought into question with investigations into close Xi associates such as Sun Lijun. The 20th Party Congress will, at a minimum, clarify who Xi's new (and returning) agents are. In addition, the event could signal whether Xi can strengthen his control by keeping top aides in their posts past the normal retirement ages or find new ways to keep them active.⁵³ Xi could also use the congress as an opportunity to shift personnel around, reducing their ability to develop personal power bases in key areas.

Third are tradeoffs between political loyalty and professional competence. The party has long tried to find the right balance between "red" and "expert," but needs to make choices about how much to emphasize one set of qualifications over another—the most loyal party cadres might not be the most professionally skilled, and vice versa. The 20th Party Congress will provide new insight into Xi's priorities. One example is whether he will preserve a CMC with a large share of officers with political responsibilities (and use success in party roles, such as members of the Central Committee, as major criteria for advancement). This would not necessarily signal that Xi fears disloyalty but would suggest a conviction that the party cannot afford to loosen its grip. Perhaps less likely, given Xi's emphasis on the "absolute leadership" of the party, he may return the CMC to its former status of being more operationally focused.⁵⁴

Fourth concerns blurred leadership of different parts of the national security machinery. All roads ultimately lead to Xi, but the system below his level remains convoluted. Most notably, the CNSC is responsible for "national security" work, but does not define its status in relation to either the CMC or the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, which oversees the MPS and MSS.⁵⁵ It is possible that Xi encouraged multiple commissions with overlapping responsibilities to prevent a concentration of power in the hands of any particular Politburo member, or that Xi needed to leave prior arrangements in place to gain support for the CNSC in 2013. Retaining the current commission structure following the 20th Party Congress would suggest that Xi is loathe to "overturn the apple cart" in favor of bureaucratic streamlining, but doing so could reduce the

ability of CNSC staff to achieve interagency coordination by leaving other Politburo officials in charge of individual bureaucracies.⁵⁶

The fifth challenge concerns the influence of China's national security leaders relative to other party elites. Previous Politburos were weighted towards officials responsible for party, state, and regional affairs, with only a handful of national security officials.⁵⁷ If Xi's level of influence is lower than commonly assumed, he may need to strike bargains between elites who mostly do not focus on national security affairs and have other priorities.⁵⁸ A rebalancing of the Politburo at the 20th Party Congress to include a greater emphasis on national security work (or other changes, such as the elevation of a CMC vice chairman to the Politburo Standing Committee) would both signal Xi's intent to focus on that set of issues in the next five years and make it easier for him to assemble consensus on hardline policies, while consistency would signal that he does not believe a change in membership is necessary.

Recommendations

The evolution of China's national security architecture before and after the 20th Party Congress has implications for human rights and external security, and should thus be the subject of continued study and analysis. Congress can support this objective in several ways.

- *Support open-source analysis.* With direct access to mainland China increasingly limited, it is particularly important that foreign analysts have access to good quality translations of Chinese literature, including party decisions, speeches, and key commentary, as well as increased training in how to use these materials most effectively (for instance, by understanding which Chinese sources should be regarded as "authoritative" and how to weight the opinions of Chinese commentators).⁵⁹ To elicit alternative perspectives, such resources should also be available, wherever practicable, to analysts outside the U.S. government. Legislation such as the Open Translation and Analysis Center Authorization Act could facilitate this goal.
- *Update the requirements for China reporting.* Congress can also request the administration to provide additional analysis on Chinese national security decision-making and implementation. For instance, the annual reports on Chinese military power produced by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) provide a thorough overview of key hardware, organizations, and operations, but offer little insight into party-army dynamics. Among other topics, Congress may require OSD to update the report with periodic analysis of reforms to the political commissar or personnel system to better understand how the party seeks control of the PLA and other security services.
- *Commission research on key topics.* To better understand recent reforms, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission may consider commissioning deep-dive research into select topics. Examples of areas where publicly available data could facilitate original analysis include China's National Security Commission system and China's evolving emergency management system. The commission might also consider commissioning forward-looking analysis on how China's national security policies might change in the post-Xi era.

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¹ For excellent overviews of the “holistic national security concept” (总体国家安全观), see Sheena Chestnut Greitens, “Internal Security and Grand Strategy: China’s Approach to National Security Under Xi Jinping,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 28, 2021; and Timothy Heath, “The ‘Holistic Security Concept’: The Securitization of Policy and the Increasing Risk of Militarized Crisis,” *China Brief*, June 19, 2015, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2015/06/the-holistic-security-concept-the-securitization.html>. For the authoritative Chinese description, see Xi Jinping, “Maintain the Holistic National Security Concept, Follow a National Security Path with Chinese Characteristics” [坚持总体国家安全观 走中国特色国家安全道路], *Xinhua*, April 15, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-04/15/c_1110253910.htm.

² For a comprehensive overview of the party-state structure, see Susan Lawrence, “China’s Political System in Charts: A Snapshot Before the 20th Party Congress,” Congressional Research Service Report, November 24, 2021. For a concise analysis of the national security architecture, see Tai Ming Cheung, “The Chinese National Security State Emerges from the Shadows to Center Stage,” *China Leadership Monitor*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.prcleader.org/cheung>.

³ “Full Text of the 3rd Plenum of the 18th Central Committee” [十八届三中全会《决定》], *Xinhua*, November 18, 2013, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/szyw/201311/18/t20131118_1767104.shtml.

⁴ For analysis, see Joel Wuthnow, “China’s New ‘Black Box’: Prospects for the Central National Security Commission,” *China Quarterly* 232 (2017), 886-903; David M. Lampton, “Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: Policy Coordination and Political Power,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24:95 (2015), 759-777; and You Ji, “China’s National Security Commission: Theory, Evolution, and Operations,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25:98 (2016), 178-196.

⁵ “Politburo Studies and Decides the Structure of the Central National Security Commission” [中共中央政治局研究决定中央国家安全委员会设置], *Xinhua*, January 24, 2014, http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2014-01/24/content_2575011.htm.

⁶ Xi, “Maintain the Holistic National Security Concept, Follow a National Security Path with Chinese Characteristics”.

⁷ “Xi Jinping Chairs and Delivers Important Remarks at the First Meeting of the Central National Security Commission of the 19th Central Committee” [习近平主持召开十九届中央国家安全委员会第一次会议并发表重要讲话], *Xinhua*, April 17, 2018, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-04/17/content_5283445.htm.

⁸ Joel Wuthnow, “A New Chinese National Security Bureaucracy Emerges,” *China Brief*, November 23, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/early-warning-brief-a-new-chinese-national-security-bureaucracy-emerges/>.

⁹ For details on PLA influence on Chinese policy, see Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, eds., *PLA Influence on China’s National Security Policymaking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ See Tai Ming Cheung, “The Riddle in the Middle: China’s Central Military Commission in the 21st Century,” in Saunders and Scobell, eds., *PLA Influence on Chinese National Security Policymaking*, 84-119.

¹¹ For a discussion, see Joel McFadden, Kim Fassler, and Justin Godby, “The New PLA Leadership: Xi Molds China’s Military to His Vision,” in Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 557-582; and James Mulvenon, “And Then There Were Seven: The New, Slimmed Down Central Military Commission,” *China Leadership Monitor* 58 (2018), <https://www.hoover.org/research/and-then-there-were-seven-new-slimmed-down-central-military-commission>.

¹² The navy, air force, and Second Artillery Force (now Rocket Force) commanders, who had ex officio positions on the CMC since 2004, lost their seats. The commander of the new ground force headquarters was not added.

¹³ Phillip C. Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019).

¹⁴ “CMC Organs Become 15 Functional Departments” [中央军委机关改为十五个职能部门], *China Youth Daily Online* [中国青年报], January 12, 2016, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0112/c70731-28039781.html>.

¹⁵ The GPD was replaced by a Political Work Department that manages the political commissar system and performs other functions. The GLD was replaced by a Logistic Support Department.

¹⁶ Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “Large and In Charge: Civil-Military Relations under Xi Jinping,” in Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 519-555.

¹⁷ For an excellent history, see Murray Scot Tanner, “The Institutional Lessons of Disaster: Reorganizing the People’s Armed Police After Tiananmen,” in James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang (eds.), *The People’s Liberation Army as Organization* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002), 587-632.

¹⁸ PRC People’s Armed Police Law [中华人民共和国人民武装警察法], National People’s Congress, August 27, 2009, http://www.gov.cn/flfg/2009-08/27/content_1403324.htm.

¹⁹ “CCP Central Committee Decides to Adjust the PAP Leadership and Command System” [中共中央决定调整中国人民武装警察部队领导指挥体制], People’s Daily [人民日报], December 28, 2017, <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1228/c117092-29733144.html>.

²⁰ Joel Wuthnow, “Who Commands the Gun? Mobilization and Use of China’s Armed Police,” unpublished manuscript, 2021.

²¹ Specifically, Article 12 allows units to “report while acting” (边行动边报告). Interestingly, this language was not present in early drafts of the revised law and perhaps added due to the practical recognition that quick PAP deployments might sometimes be necessary. PRC People’s Armed Police Law [中华人民共和国人民武装警察法], National People’s Congress, June 20, 2020, <http://npc.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0620/c14576-31754020.html>.

²² For an overview, see Joel Wuthnow, *China’s Other Army: The People’s Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, China Strategic Perspectives 14 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019).

²³ The second mobile contingent, based in Fuzhou, also likely has a mission to provide rear area support during a Taiwan contingency. See Wuthnow, *China’s Other Army*.

²⁴ The SOA received “operational guidance” from the Ministry of Public Security. For details, see Lyle Morris, “China Welcomes its Newest Armed Force: The Coast Guard,” *War on the Rocks*, April 4, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/china-welcomes-its-newest-armed-force-the-coast-guard/>.

²⁵ Jamie P. Horsley, “What’s So Controversial About China’s New Anti-Corruption Body?” *Brookings*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/whats-so-controversial-about-chinas-new-anti-corruption-body/>.

²⁶ Previously, Chinese police did not regularly carry guns. William Wan and Xu Jing, “Newly Armed Police in China Say They Fear Their Guns As Much As the Public,” *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/26/newly-armed-police-in-china-say-they-fear-their-guns-as-much-as-public/>; “China’s Smart Cities Development,” SOSi Report for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 2020.

²⁷ John Costello, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 9, 2016, 9-10.

²⁸ Minxin Pei, “The CCP’s Domestic Security Taskmaster: The Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission,” *China Leadership Monitor*, September 1, 2021.

²⁹ Wuthnow, “A New Chinese National Security Bureaucracy Emerges.”

³⁰ This returned to the previous system in which, for instance, the PLA Discipline Inspection Commission was independent of the General Political Department. See David Shambaugh, “The Soldier and the State in China: The Political Work System in the People’s Liberation Army,” *China Quarterly* 127 (1991), 527-568.

³¹ James Mulvenon, “The Cult of Xi and the Rise of the CMC Chairman Responsibility System,” *China Leadership Monitor*, January 23, 2018.

³² Saunders and Wuthnow, “Large and In Charge.”

³³ James T. Areddy, “China Levels Series of Allegations Against Former Law-Enforcement Official Sun Lijun,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-levels-series-of-allegations-against-former-law-enforcement-official-sun-lijun-11633023115>; “China Investigates Ex-Official Who Led Major Corruption Case,” *Nikkei Asia*, October 2, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/China-investigates-ex-official-who-led-major-corruption-case>.

³⁴ Ben Blanchard, Benjamin Kang Lim, and Philip Wen, “Exclusive: Xi Confidante Set to Become China’s New Spy Master: Sources,” Reuters, February 28, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-politics-security-exclusive/exclusive-xi-confidant-set-to-become-chinas-new-spy-master-sources-idUSKCN1GC17K>.

³⁵ Edward Wong, “The ‘Gatekeeper’ in Xi Jinping’s Inner Circle,” *New York Times*, September 30, 2015, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/09/30/the-gatekeeper-in-xi-jinpings-inner-circle/>.

³⁶ Susan L. Shirk, “China in Xi’s ‘New Era’: The Return to Personalistic Rule,” *Journal of Democracy* 29:2 (2018), 22-36; Alice Miller, “The 19th Central Committee Politburo,” *China Leadership Monitor*, January 23, 2018; Timothy R. Heath, “The Consolidation of Political Power in China Under Xi Jinping,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 7, 2019.

³⁷ Xi Jinping, “Strengthen the Party’s All-Around Leadership of Managing the Country According to Law” [加强党对全面依法治国的领导], *Qiushu* [求是] No. 4 (2019), http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2019-02/15/c_1124114454.htm.

³⁸ Susan Lawrence, “China’s Communist Party Absorbs More of the State,” Congressional Research Service Report, March 23, 2018, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10854/2>.

³⁹ Wuthnow, *China’s Other Army*, 6.

⁴⁰ Xi Jinping, “Maintain the Absolute Leadership of the Party Over the Armed Forces” [坚持党对人民军队的绝对领导], *Renmin Ribao* [人民日报], August 18, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-08/18/c_1127771391.htm. See also James Mulvenon, “Hotel Gutian: We Haven’t Had That Spirit Here Since 1929,” *China Leadership Monitor*, March 19, 2015.

⁴¹ See Lt. Gen. Liu Nianguang, “The Deign Arrangement and Perfection of the Party’s Absolute Leadership of the Armed Forces” [党对人民军队绝对领导制度的设计安排与坚持完善], Official Weixin of the National University of Defense Technology [国防科大微信公众号], December 13, 2019, <https://www.nudt.edu.cn/xwgg/kdyw/0090d1c7c23b4583aea7e3f88061d518.htm>. The author is the political commissar of the National University of Defense Technology. For excellent analysis, see Morgan Clemens and Benjamin Rosen, “The Impact of Reform on the PLA’s Political Work System,” in Roy Kamphausen, ed., *The People of the PLA 2.0* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Press, 2021), 28-30; and Jeff Benson and Zi Yang, *Party on the Bridge: Political Commissars in the Chinese Navy* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2020).

⁴² “On the New Officer System Reform, Authoritative Answers Are Here” [关于新的军官制度改革，权威解答来了], *China Veteran* [中国退役军人], January 12, 2021, <http://tjyr.sh.gov.cn/shtyjrsjw/xxyd/20210112/ec2d4b5d36eb483ebaa8c343f0f9924f.html>.

⁴³ Wuthnow, “China’s New ‘Black Box’”; Erickson and Liff, “Installing a Safety on the ‘Loaded Gun’?”; Lampton, “Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission”.

⁴⁴ Guoguang Wu explains that several previous leading small groups (领导小组) were upgraded into commissions (委员会) under Xi. Commissions are “more formal, prestigious, and powerful than their predecessors.” Guoguang Wu, “A Setback or Boost for Xi Jinping’s Concentration of Power? Domination Versus Resistance within the CCP Elite,” *China Leadership Monitor*, December 1, 2018, <https://www.prcleader.org/bump-or-speed-up>.

⁴⁵ Two meetings have been publicized, but details from locals NSCs, which sometimes report outputs from the CNSC, suggest that actual frequency is higher. See Wuthnow, “A New Chinese National Security Bureaucracy Emerges.”

⁴⁶ Joel Wuthnow, “A Brave New World for Chinese Joint Operations,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40:1-2 (2017), 169-195.

⁴⁷ See John Costello and Joe McReynolds, *China’s Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era*, NDU China Strategic Perspectives 13 (2018); Joel Wuthnow, “A New Era for Chinese Military Logistics,” *Asian Security* 17:3 (2021), 279-293.

⁴⁸ *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2021), 82.

⁴⁹ These organizational reforms supplemented other changes too numerous to describe in detail, including in training, military education, doctrine, hardware, and officer assignments.

⁵⁰ “China to Form Ministry of Emergency Management,” State Council, March 13, 2018, http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2018/03/13/content_281476076465182.htm.

⁵¹ “China to Set Up State Immigration Administration,” State Council, March 13, 2018, http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2018/03/13/content_281476076498988.htm.

⁵² For one party elite’s views on Xi’s concentration of power, see Cai Xia, “The Party That Failed,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2021), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-12-04/chinese-communist-party-failed>.

⁵³ Party retirement norms were largely held at the 19th Party Congress despite speculation that Xi would keep close confidantes on the Politburo. See Alice Miller, “The 19th Central Committee Politburo,” *China Leadership Monitor* 55 (Winter 2018). Xi did keep his top anti-graft official Wang Qishan, who had reached the 68-year retirement age for party cadres, as state vice president. Benjamin Kang Lim, Ben Blanchard, and Philip Wen, “China’s Xi Looks to Keep Right-Hand Man on Despite Age,” Reuters, October 11, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-congress-wang/chinas-xi-looks-set-to-keep-right-hand-man-on-despite-age-idUSKBN1CG0JI>.

⁵⁴ Specifically, at the 19th Party Congress, Xi revised the CMC so that half of its uniformed members (three of six) have political responsibilities, compared with two out of ten in the previous CMC. Among the current CMC members, vice chairman Zhang Youxia holds the political portfolio (Xu Qiliang being operational), while Political Work Department director Miao Hua and Discipline Inspection Commission secretary Zhang Shengmin have political responsibilities as well. Previously, CMC vice chairman Fan Changlong and General Political Department director Zhang Yang held similar responsibilities. For analysis, see McFadden, Fassler, and Godby, “The New PLA Leadership.”

⁵⁵ Pei, “The CCP’s Domestic Security Taskmaster.” Additionally, the diplomatic machinery is coordinated by a Foreign Affairs Commission, which was established in 2018 and is also led by Xi. “CPC Releases Plan on Deepening Reform of Party and State Institutions,” Xinhua, March 22, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0322/c90000-9440252.html>.

⁵⁶ The Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission is led by Politburo member Guo Shengkun while the CMC is represented on the Politburo by its two vice chairmen, currently Xu Qiliang and Zhang Youxia. The director of the CNSC Office, Ding Xuexiang, is at the same level. Alternatively, Xi could elevate the director of the CNSC office to a Standing Committee member, who would have more authority to compel civil-military coordination.

⁵⁷ Miller assesses only 3 of 21 Politburo members following the 19th Party Congress as “military/security” officials, though at least two others (CNSC office director Ding Xuexiang and Foreign Affairs czar Yang Jiechi) play related roles. Miller, “The 19th Central Committee Politburo.”

⁵⁸ For conflicting perspectives, see Miller, “The 19th Central Committee Politburo,” and Joseph Fewsmith, “Balances, Norms, and Institutions: Why Elite Politics in the CCP Have Not Institutionalized,” *China Quarterly* 248 (November 2021), 265-282.

⁵⁹ For a useful analysis in the context of military signaling, see Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga et al., *Deciphering Chinese Deterrence Signaling in the New Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2021). See also Paul H.B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, *China's Forbearance Has Its Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation*, China Strategic Perspectives 6 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2013).