

## SECURITY

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Few things are more important for an authoritarian ruler like Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), than leadership over the domestic security apparatus. Known as “the knife” in Chinese political discourse, the institutions of law enforcement, intelligence work, and political discipline form one part of an unholy trinity of political control systems—together with “the gun” of the military and “the pen” of the propaganda outlets—that a CCP leader must dominate in order to call the shots in Beijing. Xi’s major push to “integrate development and security” in his second term both elevated the importance of national security relative to economic development in Chinese policymaking and supported his consolidation of personal authority over the internal security pillar of this trinity.

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### Institutions

The **CCP Central National Security Commission (CNSC)** is the top institution devoted to security policy below the overall leadership of the party’s elite 24-member Politburo and the 7-member Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). Xi established the CNSC in November 2013 to centralize and coordinate policy responses to domestic threats against the CCP regime and foreign threats against the Chinese nation. This move was a political effort by Xi to wrest control of the security apparatus from his rivals, a bureaucratic reform to reduce fragmentation and stove-piping between security agencies, and a governance push to improve the party’s resilience by embracing the extreme vigilance of “comprehensive national security.” Xi has served as CNSC Chairman since its first meeting in April 2014. The Premier of the State Council and the Chairman of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC), the two top-ranked PSC members after Xi, serve as CNSC Vice Chairmen, and the Director of the CCP General Office, currently also a PSC member, serves as Director of the CNSC Office. The CNSC is opaque even by Beijing’s standards, but its membership is thought to include around half of the Politburo and most of the Central Military

Commission (CMC), making it one of the most powerful party commissions or leading groups. Local-level NSCs also exist in provinces, cities, and counties.

The CCP Central Comprehensive Law-Based Governance Commission (CCLBGC) is the party's top policy coordination body for the development of China's legal and regulatory systems. "Law-based governance" is the name for Xi's massive campaign, begun at the Fourth Plenum in October 2014, to improve the party's governance of China by further institutionalizing the operation of its powers through more legislation, better regulation, and a more reliable legal process. This concept emphasizes the greater use of laws to delimit the powers of officials, citizens, and firms throughout the country and establish clear, consistent, and enforceable procedures for governing in all spheres. Xi established the CCLBGC as part of his March 2018 party-state institutional reforms, and he has chaired the body since its first meeting in August 2018. The same three PSC members with leadership roles on the CNSC—the Premier, the NPCSC Chairman, and the First Secretary of the CCP Central Secretariat—serve as Deputy Directors, with the Secretary of the CCP Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission serving as Director and the Minister of Justice serving as Deputy Director of the CCLBGC Office.

The **CCP Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (CPLAC)** is a ministerial-level functional department of the CCP Central Committee that coordinates the politically sensitive work of law enforcement, social stability, and security services. The CPLAC Secretary is a Politburo member but not a PSC member—which was the case from 2002 to 2012—because Xi wanted to build his own authority and curtail the power of other leaders in these crucial spheres. The last CPLAC Secretary to sit on the PSC was Zhou Yongkang, an ally of Xi's ousted rival Bo Xilai. Zhou, the most senior target of Xi's sweeping anti-corruption campaign, was placed under investigation in late 2013 and sentenced to life in prison in June 2015. However, the CPLAC is still more influential than its ministerial rank suggests as it is led by a deputy national-level Politburo member. The CPLAC membership reflects the organizations that it oversees, with the Minister of Public Security serving as Deputy Secretary and ordinary members including the leaders of the Supreme People's Court, Supreme People's Procuratorate, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Justice, CMC Political and Legal Affairs Commission, and People's Armed Police (which is controlled by the CMC), plus a full-time ministerial-level CPLAC Secretary-General. The CPLAC sits atop a system of local PLACs in provincial-level and then county-level party committees.

The **Supreme People's Court (SPC)** is a deputy national-level state institution that is the highest court for the People's Republic of China (PRC) and for Hong Kong cases that involve the National Security Law. The SPC is not an independent judicial branch of government because it answers to the National People's Congress (NPC) administratively and is subservient to the CCP politically; furthermore, it lacks the power of constitutional review (although it can ask the NPCSC to review the constitutionality of a regulation). The SPC is the court of first instance for a handful of national

cases, but it mostly hears appeals that come up through China's local judicial system of Higher People's Courts, Intermediate People's Courts, and Primary People's Courts, plus Courts of Special Jurisdiction such as Financial Courts, Internet Courts, and Intellectual Property Courts. Cases in all provincial-level regions except for Beijing, Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, and Tianjin are now handled by one of six SPC Circuit Courts that have the same level of final jurisdiction as the SPC. China has a civil law system, and the SPC's reply to a case is binding only for that specific case, but it also issues judicial interpretations that are legally binding on courts at all levels. The SPC is also responsible for managing administration, enforcement, and supervision in courts of all levels. At the Two Sessions following a Party Congress, the PRC President nominates a candidate to serve a five-year term as President and Chief Justice of the SPC; the NPC must approve this selection. The SPC has seven Vice Presidents and many hundreds of lower-ranked judges.

The **Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP)** is a deputy national-level state institution that serves as the chief public prosecutor of the PRC. Like the SPC, it is responsible to the NPC and subservient to the CCP. It investigates and prosecutes criminal cases, reviews lower-level prosecutions, and can appeal verdicts from lower-level courts and issue its own legal interpretations. Its clout was reduced somewhat in the party-state institutional reforms of March 2018, when Beijing reassigned the task of investigating corruption by government officials from the SPP to the new National Supervisory Commission. Like the SPC, at the Two Sessions following a Party Congress, the PRC President nominates an SPP Procurator-General for a five-year term, a selection that must then win NPC approval. The SPP has a ministerial-level Executive Deputy Procurator-General and three Deputy Procurators-General.

The **Ministry of Public Security (MPS)** is a constituent department of the State Council that manages most of the country's police forces (the People's Police). The MPS, in conjunction with local authorities, oversees provincial-level public security departments, which oversee county-level public security bureaus, which, in turn, oversee grassroots-level police stations that interface with citizens. The MPS is an unusually weighty ministry because it is the institution most directly responsible for maintaining public order and defusing social unrest on the Chinese streets, as well as duties including criminal investigations, detention centers, counterterrorism, counternarcotics, anti-smuggling, transport security, and traffic safety. It also administers the deputy ministerial-level National Immigration Administration (NIA) and has pioneered controversial policies such as smart surveillance technologies and overseas police stations to target political dissidents and absconded officials. The Minister of Public Security usually serves as a State Councilor, elevating them to the deputy national level and signaling the importance of the MPS relative to other ministries, on a par only with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense. The Minister of Public Security also serves as Director of the MPS Special Duty Bureau, which is responsible for protecting foreign VIPs, the Vice President, and deputy national-level leaders of the CPPCC, NPC, SPC, SPP, and State Council. MPS Deputy Ministers usually serve as NIA Director, Director of the

Beijing Public Security Bureau, Director of the Legal System Bureau, or Director of the Political Security Bureau, which handles threats to party power, cracking down on political dissidents, combating supposed ethnic separatism and religious extremism, and MPS work related to Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

The **Ministry of State Security (MSS)** is a constituent department of the State Council that holds primary responsibility for intelligence, political security, and the secret services. Its activities include domestic intelligence, foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, geospatial intelligence, industrial espionage, the security of overseas Belt and Road Initiative projects in many countries, and the repression of dissidents in China and abroad through its own State Security Police. Increasingly, the MSS has also taken on a leading role in Chinese cyberespionage and intellectual property theft, commanding several “advanced persistent threat” hacker groups that have been indicted by the US government. It has broad powers under China’s National Intelligence Law to force cooperation from Chinese individuals, corporations, and government agencies. Like the MPS, the MSS has local branches in China’s provincial-, county-, and township-level governments. Both the Minister of State Security and the Minister of Public Security hold the top rank of Commissioner-General in the People’s Police.

The **Ministry of Justice (MOJ)** is a constituent department of the State Council in charge of legal affairs, including judicial administration, crime prevention, forensic teams, legal training, legal aid, regulating the legal profession, coordinating legislative work, reviewing local legislation, and overseeing administrative law enforcement as well as administrative reviews and responses. It also manages China’s national prisons, except Qincheng Prison in Beijing, a maximum-security facility administered by the MPS that holds the country’s highest-level political prisoners. The Minister of Justice is effectively China’s Attorney General. Although the MPS and MSS are powerful agencies with crucial security functions, the MOJ is a purely civilian institution that enjoys less political clout. However, its standing has increased somewhat in line with Xi’s focus on law-based governance, and since 2018, it has housed the General Office of the CCLBGC and absorbed the former State Council Legal Affairs Office.

The **CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI)** is a national-level party institution that is responsible for maintaining political discipline within the party by monitoring policy implementation, enforcing internal rules and directives, and leading the investigation and punishment of corruption and other malfeasance by party members. The CCDI is subordinate to the central party leadership, but Xi has strengthened its authority over the rest of the party bureaucracy, especially at the local level. A new CCDI is selected every five years at the Party Congress; the CCDI then holds a First Plenum to select its Standing Committee, Deputy Secretaries, and Secretary, who are then endorsed by the new CCP Central Committee at its own First Plenum. The current 20th CCDI, selected at the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, has 133

members, including an 18-person Standing Committee, eight Deputy Secretaries, and one Secretary. The CCDI Secretary is a PSC member, the CCDI Deputy Secretary who leads the National Supervisory Commission is a deputy national-level official, and the other CCDI Deputy Secretaries are ministerial-level officials. The CCDI sits atop a national system of Commissions for Discipline Inspection (CDIs) in local governments across the country.

The CCDI Secretary serves as Head of the CCP Central Leading Group for Inspection Work (CLGIW), a policy coordination body that manages the party's practice of sending "inspection teams" into party organs, state ministries, local governments, and state-owned enterprises to monitor political discipline. The LSGIW was founded in 2009, but under Xi's leadership, it has become a more important body with stronger control over Central Inspection Teams, which have also expanded in number and number of targets. The Director of the CCP Organization Department and the Director of the National Supervisory Commission serve as Deputy Heads, and the CLGIW office is located within the CCDI. Each provincial-level local party committee has its own leading group for inspection work led by the provincial CDI secretary.

The National Supervisory Commission (NSC) is a deputy national-level institution of the PRC that is co-located with the CCDI. It was established as part of the March 2018 party-state institutional reforms as a government super-agency to monitor policy implementation, investigate official malfeasance, and decide administrative sanctions among public servants, regardless of whether they are CCP members. The NSC absorbed the former Ministry of Supervision and the former National Bureau of Corruption Prevention under the State Council. The NPC appoints the NSC Director for a five-year term at the Two Sessions following each Party Congress. The NSC Director then nominates seven Deputy Directors and seven members, who are appointed by the NPC. The first NSC Director, who served from 2018 to 2023, was a Politburo member, but the current Director is not a member despite holding a seat on the powerful CCP Central Secretariat. The NSC Director serves concurrently as the CCDI Executive Deputy Director, demonstrating the subservience of the NSC to the CCDI. The NSC also leads the work of supervisory commissions at all levels of local government.

The **National Audit Office (NAO)** is a ministerial-level constituent department of the State Council that is responsible for auditing the finances of the central government and of provincial governments and public institutions that receive central funds. It also conducts audits of natural resources and environmental performance. The NAO has played a key role under Xi's anti-corruption campaign in detecting financial malpractice and official malfeasance. In the 2018 institutional reforms, the NAO acquired powers from other government agencies to inspect major projects, state-owned enterprises, central budgets, and central revenues and expenditures. The importance of a strong audit system for political discipline and effective governance was underscored by Xi's creation that same year of a **CCP Central Audit Commission (CCPCAC)**, of

which he is Chairman and the Premier and CCDI Secretary are Vice Chairmen. The commission has its office in the NAO, and the NAO Auditor-General serves as its Director.

The **CCP Central Social Work Department (CSWD)** is a new ministerial-level functional department of the CCP Central Committee that was announced as part of the party-state institutional reforms of March 2023. It is the first new functional department since the CPLAC was restored to this status in 1990. The CSWD is responsible for handling citizen complaints, collecting citizen suggestions, coordinating party work in grassroots governance and capacity building, leading the party work and institutional transformation of national industry associations and chambers of commerce, and guiding party building in mixed-ownership enterprises, nonpublic enterprises, "new economic organizations" (such as private firms, foreign-invested firms, joint-stock cooperatives, and sole traders), "new social organizations" (such as community groups and nongovernmental organizations), and "new employment groups" (such as gig workers and online influencers). The CSWD will sit atop a new central-local system of social work departments in provincial-, city-, and county-level party committees. The new department will provide organizational muscle and institutional advocacy to bolster Xi's efforts to extend the party's presence and influence in the nonstate economy and at the most basic levels of neighborhood governance. The CSWD also exercises leadership over the National Public Complaints and Proposals Administration (NPCPA), a deputy ministerial-level organ that is technically under the State Council and handles citizen "petitions" to oppose or urge actions at any level of government. This shifts oversight of China's citizen feedback system away from the state and to the party, giving Xi more direct control of crucial information for gauging grassroots public opinion and potentially avoiding a repeat of the zero-COVID mass protests of November 2022.

Xi's expanding definition of national security means that many more government institutions now ostensibly have a role in security policy. One prominent example is the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) that was founded in 2014 as the country's Internet censor and which has evolved into a powerful policymaker, regulator, and enforcer for Chinese cybersecurity (see "Technology" section).

## People

**Xi Jinping** (June 1953) is the single most important policymaker in the security space because of his leadership of the Politburo and PSC, as well as the CNSC, CCLBGC, and CCPCAC. His hold on the security services, a key aspect of his grip on overall political power, is supplemented by having PSC allies including **Li Qiang**, **Zhao Leji**, **Cai Qi**, and **Li Xi** serve as his deputies on these central commissions.

**Liu Haixing** (April 1963) is the ministerial-level Executive Deputy Director of the CNSC General Office. He is a key bureaucratic powerbroker in national security policymaking at home and abroad. Previously, he was a career diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) from 1985 until 2017, where he specialized in French and European affairs, including a stint as a Minister in the Chinese Embassy in France from 2009 to 2012. He left MOFA as an Assistant Foreign Minister, becoming a Deputy Director of the CNSC General Office in March 2017 before winning promotion to ministerial rank in July 2022. Liu, like Xi, is the “princeling” son of a senior official, which may explain how he came to win Xi’s trust to hold this especially sensitive position. His father, Liu Shuqing, was a senior diplomat who served as a Deputy Foreign Minister from 1984 to 1989 and then as Secretary-General of the CCP Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group and Director of the State Council Foreign Affairs Office from 1989 to 1991.

**Chen Wenqing** (January 1960) is a Politburo member who serves as the CPLAC Secretary. Chen is from Sichuan Province, and after graduating from law school, he spent most of his early career in local public security bureaus before leading the provincial state security department and people’s procuratorate. Chen Wenqing was celebrated for his role in ending the run of two murderous fugitives while he was a District Police Chief in 1988. Chen was transferred to Fujian in 2006, where he worked as CCDI Secretary and then Deputy Party Secretary, serving on the provincial CCP standing committee with Xi’s confidante He Lifeng (now a Vice Premier) and close to Xi allies Wang Xiaohong (now the Minister of Public Security), Zheng Shanjie, and Zhuang Rongwen. Immediately after the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, Chen was promoted to a Deputy Secretary role in the CCDI, where he helped take out Xi’s political rivals in the early years of the anti-corruption campaign, working alongside other officials whom Xi has since promoted into senior leadership roles. Chen was promoted again to MSS Party Secretary in 2015, then concurrently appointed Minister of State Security in 2016, adding the roles of CNSC Executive Deputy Director and CPLAC member in 2018. He served in these positions until his elevation to the Politburo in October 2022. Chen is a loyal Xi supporter and convened a CPLAC meeting during the zero-COVID protests of November 2022 to affirm that the security services would “resolutely crack down” on threats to social order.

**Wang Xiaohong** (July 1957) is the State Councilor who serves as Minister of Public Security and CPLAC Deputy Secretary. He is the second-ranked security specialist after Chen Wenqing, and, like Chen, he has a seat on the seven-person CCP Central Secretariat. A native of the Fujianese capital, Wang worked in the Fuzhou police force for over two decades, rising from an ordinary policeman to city police chief. He was promoted repeatedly during the tenure of first Xi and then Xi’s confidante He Lifeng as Party Secretary of Fuzhou. Xi likely helped promote Wang to serve as a Deputy Director of the Fujian MPS a few months before Xi left for Zhejiang in November 2002. Wang stagnated in this role for nine years, until a horizontal transfer allowed him to gain valuable local leadership experience in Xi’s power base of Xiamen and then in the provincial-level governments of

Henan and Beijing. He was made an MPS Deputy Minister and Director of the Beijing MPS in 2016, ministerial-level MPS Executive Deputy Minister in 2018, MPS Party Secretary and CPLAC member in November 2021, and finally Minister in June 2022. Wang is a trusted aide of Xi, personally leading an MPS special work group to crack down on an alleged ring of disloyal security cadres led by former MPS Deputy Minister Sun Lijun.

**Zhang Jun** (October 1956) is President and Chief Justice of the SPC and a CPLAC member. He is one of the most experienced legal officials in the country, having served as the top leader of the MOJ, SPP, and SPC. He earned an undergraduate law degree at Jilin University (where he likely knew Politburo member Li Hongzhong, who studied there at the same time, through the university's CCP activities) and a master's degree in criminal law at Renmin University of China in Beijing. He climbed the SPC system as a legal secretary and then judge for almost two decades, working as a Vice President from 2001 to 2003 and again from 2005 to 2012, with a stint as Deputy Minister for Justice in between. In the Xi era, Zhang served as a CCDI Deputy Secretary from 2012 to 2017 (with Chen Wenqing and Liu Jinguo), Minister of Justice from 2017 to 2018, and SPP Procurator-General from 2018 to March 2023. Zhang does not have political ties to Xi from earlier in his career, although he clearly provided loyal political service at the CCDI at the start of Xi's anti-corruption campaign. His continued promotion reflects Xi's desire to improve China's law-based governance by elevating genuine legal experts to leadership positions.

**Ying Yong** (November 1957) is Procurator-General of the SPP and a CPLAC member. Ying is a native of Taizhou City in Zhejiang, where he spent the first 15-odd years of his career as a police officer and local public security official. He rose through the public security ranks in Shaoxing City and then became a deputy in the Zhejiang public security department, where he took a leading role in significant crackdowns against smuggling and organized crime. After Xi became Party Secretary of Zhejiang in 2002, by which time Ying had completed graduate studies in law, he was promoted to serve as a Deputy Secretary of the Zhejiang CCDI and then as President of Zhejiang's top court, where he led efforts to improve access to and reduce corruption in the legal system. The month after Xi ended his brief stint as Party Secretary of Shanghai in October 2007, Ying was transferred to the lead the top court in the politically influential metropolis. In April 2013, shortly after Xi became paramount leader, Ying was promoted to the Shanghai CCP standing committee. He eventually served as Mayor of Shanghai from January 2017 to February 2020, when Xi dispatched (and promoted) him to take over as Party Secretary of the besieged province of Hubei in the middle of the first COVID-19 outbreak. Ying appeared to be a Politburo contender until he was unexpectedly sidelined from this leadership role to an NPC committee in April 2022. That move is usually a sure sign of impending retirement, but in September, Ying was made Zhang Jun's heir-apparent, another example of Xi's promotion of experienced (and politically loyal) legal and security experts.



**Chen Yixin** (September 1959) is Minister of State Security, a Deputy Director of the CCLBGC Office, and a CPLAC member. Chen is from Lishui City in Zhejiang, where he worked as a local cadre before spending a decade in the general office of the Zhejiang CCP committee, rising to become its Deputy Director from 2000 to 2003. In the latter year, Xi promoted Chen to Deputy Secretary-General of the Zhejiang CCP committee, a high-level political secretary role that he held until 2011, working directly under Secretary-General Li Qiang. Chen then gained experience as a local leader in the Zhejiang cities of Jinhua and Wenzhou, before Xi brought him to Beijing in 2015 to be the Special Deputy Director of what is now the General Office of the Central Comprehensively Deepening Reforms Commission. After serving as Deputy Party Secretary of Hubei, Chen Yixin became CPLAC Secretary-General in 2018, in which capacity he led a two-year purge for Xi that felled former Minister of Justice Fu Zhenghua and former Deputy Minister of Public Security Sun Lijun. He became Minister of State Security in October 2022. Chen can be expected to enforce a hard line against external opponents of the CCP and internal opponents of Xi's leadership.

**He Rong** (October 1962) is Minister of Justice, a Deputy Director of the CCLBGC Office, and a CPLAC member. One of only two female ministers, she holds a bachelor's, master's (from the University of Technology Sydney), and doctorate in law. She worked in the Beijing municipal court system from 1984 to 2011 before promotion to the SPC system, where she was a Vice President from 2013 to 2017. Her upward trajectory was confirmed when she was rotated to the Shaanxi provincial CCP standing committee, serving as Deputy Party Secretary from 2018 to 2020. Before her MOJ appointment, she served as the ministerial-level SPC Executive Vice President from 2020 to 2023, winning a seat on the CCP Central Committee for the first time at the 20th Party Congress. He lacks strong ties to Xi, although she was a rising star in the local judiciary when Xi's ally Wang Qishan was Mayor of Beijing in the 2000s. Her appointment should be seen as a sign of rising professionalization in China's legal governance.

**Yin Bai** (April 1969) replaced Chen Yixin as the ministerial-level CPLAC Secretary-General in March 2023, having served as a CPLAC Deputy Secretary-General since July 2022. Unusually for a high-ranking security official, Yin is not a member of the Han ethnic majority; rather, he belongs to the Nakhi ethnic minority that hail from Yunnan, although his place of ancestry is reported as Beijing. Yin studied and worked in Yunnan as a management academic, government leader, local judge, political and legal affairs official, and provincial prosecutor until 2016. He was then in Qinghai until his CPLAC appointment, working as head of the provincial PLAC and eventually as Deputy Party Secretary as well. However, unlike Chen during the last five years, Yin is not an alternate member of the CCP Central Committee, indicating that the role is less influential now that Chen has left. Yin has significant experience in ethnic governance: he has worked in the Yi, Tibetan, and Mongolian Autonomous Regions and holds a doctorate in ethnic politics and public administration, suggesting that minority groups will remain a top internal security focus for Xi.

Two uniformed military leaders, **Wang Renhua** (1962), Secretary of the CMC Political and Legal Affairs Commission, and **Wang Chunning** (March 1963), Commander of the People's Armed Police (PAP), are the other members of the CPLAC. Wang Renhua is a Vice Admiral in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy who entered the CPLAC with his current position in December 2019 after serving in leadership roles in the political work and political discipline sections of the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, the PLA Ground Forces, and the East Sea Fleet. Wang Chunning is a General in the PLA Ground Forces who spent most of his career with what is now the PLA 72nd Group Army in Huzhou, Zhejiang Province, where he overlapped with Xi's tenure as Party Secretary of Zhejiang from 2002 to 2007. In 2016, Xi appointed Wang Chunning as Commander of the PLA Beijing Garrison, which is responsible for security in the national capital, a sign of deep trust in his political loyalty. He became PAP Commander in 2020. The PAP, under the command of the CMC, is an armed force dedicated to domestic security and quelling internal unrest.

**Li Xi** (October 1956) is the PSC member who serves as CCDI Director. He worked his way up the ladder of local government leadership in his native Gansu before a promotion to the Shaanxi provincial CCP standing committee in 2004. There, he served as Party Secretary of the revolutionary heartland of Yan'an from 2006 to 2011, working directly under Xi ally and then provincial leader from 2007. Li joined first joined the Central Committee as an alternate at the 17th Party Congress in 2007, and his promotion of CCP history in Yan'an reportedly impressed Xi during trips to his ancestral homeland (including special attention to the story of Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun, and that of Xi himself as a sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution in the nearby village of Liangjiahe). Li is also thought to have deeper ties to Xi through his time in the mid-1980s working as a political secretary to Li Ziqi, then Party Secretary of Gansu, who was a friend of Xi Zhongxun from their revolutionary days. After Shaanxi, Li was Organization Head and Deputy Party Secretary in Shanghai, where he worked with several other close Xi allies from 2011 to 2014, before serving as Governor and then Party Secretary of Liaoning between 2014 and 2017 and as Party Secretary of Guangdong during his first term on the Politburo from 2017 to 2022. An unusual aspect of Li's promotion to CCDI Director is that he ranks seventh in the PSC, right behind Executive Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang; these positions were reversed during Xi's first two terms, suggesting that Xi now sees anti-corruption as a relatively less pressing priority for elite politics.

**Liu Jinguo** (April 1955) became Director of the NSC in March 2023 and a member of the CCP Central Secretariat in October 2022. From a poor family in Qinhuangdao, he worked in his native Hebei until 2005, mostly in local branches of the MPS and CCDI, reaching the provincial CCP standing committee. Liu Jinguo was a Deputy Minister of Public Security from 2005 to 2015, where he was praised by state media for his incorruptibility and his prominent role in the on-the-ground responses to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and the 2010 Xingang Port oil spill. He served as a CCDI Deputy Secretary from 2014 to 2022 and an NSC Deputy Director from 2018 to 2023. These roles put him in regular contact with Xi allies including Wang Qishan, Zhao Leji, Chen Wenqing,

and Li Shulei. The strength of Liu's historical ties to Xi are unclear: he was a full-time student at the Hebei Provincial Party School in Shijiazhuang from 1983 to 1985, when both Xi and his retired ally Li Zhanshu were party secretaries of two urban counties in the city. Liu is a trusted operator, but his exclusion from the Politburo suggests a renewed focus on the CCDI over the NSC.

**Hou Kai** (April 1962) heads the NAO as its Auditor-General. He is a career auditor who started at the NAO right out of college in 1984 and worked there until 2013, when he had achieved the position of Deputy Auditor-General. He worked with several key Xi allies in the Shanghai municipal party as head of its discipline inspection commission from 2013 to 2016, then served as a Deputy Secretary working under top Xi aide Ding Xuexiang in the new CCP Central and State Organs Working Committee from 2018 to 2020, at which point he was promoted to Auditor-General. He has been a member of the CCDI Standing Committee since 2012, showing the close connection between auditing work and Xi's control over political discipline investigations. Hou is also Chairman of the United Nations Board of Auditors.

**Wu Hansheng** (April 1963) is the first CSWD Director. He is a trained engineer who worked in the former Ministry of Machine-Building Industry before beginning a long association with the former CCP State Organs Work Committee, which managed party affairs in state institutions, and its successor, the CCP Central and State Organs Work Committee. However, Wu spent most of the 2000s working in local governments, including stints under Xi allies Li Xi in Liaoning Province and Lou Yangsheng in Shanxi Province. Wu is a ministerial-level official, suggesting that the CSWD will have similar bureaucratic weight as the International Liaison Department—not more influential CCP agencies like the Organization Department and Propaganda Department, which are led by Politburo members.

## Policy

Xi has significantly elevated security as a core objective in all areas of Chinese policymaking (see also "Foreign Affairs"). His authoritative report to the 20th Party Congress in October 2022 specified that national security should "permeate every aspect and the whole process" of governance, introduced a top-level goal for the party to "comprehensively strengthen the national security system" by 2035, and identified several security concerns and "party members and cadres with weak commitment" as central challenges that the CCP must address in the next five years. Congress reports usually follow a rigid topical structure, but this most recent edition added a new section devoted to national security, sending a strong signal about its rising priority and the enhanced role of Xi's personal security czars in Beijing.

Xi's second term saw him shift his campaign to control the security bureaucracy—which began in his first term with purges of officials associated with ex-security czar Zhou Yongkang and ex-leader

Jiang Zemin—into a higher gear. The campaign took off with the launch in July 2020 of a Mao-style “education and rectification” campaign within the CPLAC, led by Xi acolyte Chen Yixin. Official media accounts compared Xi’s campaign with the Yan’an Rectification Movement of 1942 to 1945, when Mao launched sweeping internal purges to establish his unquestioned authority as party leader. Xi’s purge proceeded at breakneck speed, bringing down high-ranking officials including Sun Lijun, Fu Zhenghua, and Shanghai police chief Gong Dao’an for corruption and alleged anti-CCP political plots. These arrests eliminated the last significant figures associated with Meng Jianzhu, a crony of late paramount leader Jiang Zemin, and paved the way for Xi to install allies across the security system.

Xi’s success at reorganizing CCP institutions and appointing the leaders of China’s security, intelligence, and legal apparatuses will advance the “securitization” of policymaking that has developed during his leadership. Xi’s concept of “comprehensive national security,” introduced in 2014, has been dramatically expanded to include at least 16 domains: military, territorial, technological, ecological, societal, polar, cyber, space, cultural, political, economic, biological, deep sea, resource, nuclear, and overseas interests. Xi has also sought to weave a seamlessly integrated fabric of mutually reinforcing security, legal, and disciplinary frameworks under his comprehensive national security umbrella.

Xi’s consolidated security system is likely to oversee further tightening of social controls—in both the physical and digital realms—as well as the promotion of a political and social narrative that China is besieged by spies, saboteurs, and “hostile foreign forces” seeking to overthrow the CCP regime through a “color revolution.” That, combined with Xi’s harping on an ever-expanding list of “risks” confronting the regime from “changes unseen in a century” in both the domestic and external arenas, suggests a more paranoid and sharper CCP regime during Xi’s third term and beyond.

A critical question for the future of China’s security system is whether slowing economic growth and more repressive policies will create larger social disturbances, as the “Blank Paper Protests” against Xi’s zero-COVID policies in many cities in November 2022 show that political protests are not a thing of the past. More contentious state-society relations could present new threats to Xi’s political power and affect the political influence of his security czars, depending on how well they contain such threats.

A notable feature of Xi’s new, much broader definition of national security is the more regular transfer of officials within and between the various parts of the regime’s control bureaucracy. Particularly notable is the phenomenon of officials with experience in the CCDI being moved into security roles and vice versa. These bureaucracies were once rigidly stove-piped and isolated from each other; the move toward greater cross-fertilization between control agencies is arguably

improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CCP's security enterprise. The rising emphasis during Xi's tenure on the CCDI's anti-corruption mission and its role as the guarantor of ideological orthodoxy and policy implementation—in areas such as economic policy and financial policy—also serves to enhance the natural affinity between the institution and more traditional security agencies.

The work of political discipline organs like the CCDI in improving the party's self-governance is critical to Xi's ambition for the party to recognize, resolve, and learn from its past errors and achieve a perpetual state of "self-revolution." Xi believes that self-revolution is a key reason why the party overcame past challenges and survived its first hundred years. He has described the party's fight against corruption and ill-discipline as a "forever journey." A stronger focus on discipline and security could aid Xi's ability to push through difficult reforms, but it could also raise the short-term risk of overly rigid policy implementation and the longer-term risk of local stasis on controversial policies that risk social instability.