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‘Chinese President Xi Jinping reacts to Inner-Party Opposition’

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After an extended hiatus when Covid-19 and the economy appeared to preoccupy the Chinese leadership, Chinese President Xi Jinping fired a warning shot across the bow of opponents and potential opponents in the middle and higher echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). A meeting of the Politburo on April 17, 2020, chaired by Chinese President Xi Jinping approved the establishment of a new ‘Small Group’ on Security. It also approved its membership.

2. Designated the ‘Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group’, China’s official news agency Xinhua said (April 21) the new organisation’s declared task is to: “Prevent and crackdown on activities that endanger the political security of the country”! Reflecting the Party’s anxieties about domestic social unrest it quickly held its first meeting on April 21. This small group is headed by Guo Shengkun, Politburo (PB) member and Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission (PLAC), which is at the apex of China’s security apparatus. All the nine members of the ‘Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group’ are Xi Jinping loyalists with some continuing in office beyond what was the age for retirement as per the CCP’s convention till 2017. Shaken by the failed grab for power in 2012 by Zhou Yongkang, who was then Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member and Chairman of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission and informally referred to as China’s ‘Security Czar’, Xi Jinping has ensured since coming to power at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 that his, and the CCP’s, grip over the country’s security apparatus and Chinese society is firm and unyielding. Xi Jinping has since then headed the PLAC with a handpicked Politburo member as Secretary.

3. Xi Jinping has paid a lot of attention to security and maintenance of public order, or “social stability” as it is euphemistically called, including at the micro level. At the Central Political and Legal Work Conference in January 2019, he announced that China’s leadership has

accorded higher priority to political-legal work since the 18th Party Congress. Chinese President Xi Jinping has also made major changes in China's security structure. The National Security Commission (NSC) (中央国家安全委员会) was set up in November 2013; the National Supervisory Commission (国家监察委员会) was established in 2018; and the People's Armed Police (PAP) (中国人民武装警察部队) was restructured in 2017-18. Since their establishment the NSC and National Supervisory Commission have extended the Party and central government's authority throughout the country and set up subordinate offices in provinces and counties.

4. The new 'Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group' is an organisation with an apparent different focus. It has a very wide ambit and the task of preventing "activities that endanger the political security of the country", gives it sanction to monitor the political and other activities of Party members. This encompasses not only sabotage and subversion, but all other activities that could be deemed to threaten the 'Party Centre' or weaken the CCP. It can be anticipated to reinforce the Party's anti-corruption body, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission. The organisation has been set up at this time when, provoked by mishandling of the Coronavirus pandemic at Wuhan, there is increasing criticism from various sections of Chinese society directed at the CCP and Xi Jinping personally. Reflecting the public mood some Party members and cadres too joined academics, intellectuals, students, economists, 'private' entrepreneurs and others, and posted their criticism on personal or official public social media accounts risking certain punishment. Some even called for Xi Jinping to step down. There is discontent also among the millions of unemployed workers and demobilised soldiers and veterans who have not been rehabilitated or feel they have not got their due. The Coronavirus, or Covid-19, pandemic, which has adversely impacted the economy and rendered millions more jobless, has added to China's economic difficulties. Worrying Xi Jinping in particular would be the two letters purported to have been written by "princelings", China's influential and powerful elite consisting of the children and relatives of veteran Party leaders.

5. The brief bio-profiles of the nine members of the 'Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group' are given below.

- i. **Guo Shengkun:** is 65 years old. He is from Jiangxi province and was Minister of Public Security from 2012 till October 2017. He entered politics in 2004 in the Guangxi

- Zhuang region after working in State-owned Enterprises and the non-ferrous metals industry for over 20 years. He became Party Secretary of the Guangxi-Zhuang Autonomous Region in 2007.
- ii. **Zhao Kezhi:** He visited India in October 2018. In addition to being Minister for Public Security, Zhao Kezhi has worked closely with two of Xi Jinping's long time confidants namely Li Zhanshu and Guo Shengkun. Zhao Kezhi was again appointed Minister of Public Security at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017.
 - iii. **Zhao Qiang:** Born on April 25, 1960, Zhou Qiang was appointed Party Secretary of Hunan in April 2010 making him one of the youngest provincial Party Secretaries in the country. He has headed the Communist Youth League and in March 2013, was appointed President of the Supreme People's Court. He is considered to be aligned with Xi Jinping and speaking at a Supreme People's Court meeting on January 14, 2017, asserted: [China's courts] must firmly resist the western idea of "constitutional democracy" and "judicial independence". Describing them as erroneous western notions that threaten the leadership of the ruling Communist Party and defame the Chinese socialist path on the rule of law, he said "We must stay firm on the Chinese socialist path on the rule of law".
 - iv. **Zhang Jun:** He has had a steady, uninterrupted rise in China's law enforcement system. In February 2017 he was appointed Minister of Justice and in March 2018 took over as Procurator General.
 - v. **Chen Yixin:** A 'Cultural Revolution Rusticated Youth', Chen Yixin joined the CCP in 1982. He spent his entire career in Zhejiang where he proved himself in the Wenzhou City Party Committee. He was brought to Beijing by Xi Jinping as Deputy Director in the CCP CC's Central Small Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reform in the General Office. He is now Secretary General of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission (PLAC).
 - vi. **Chen Wenqing:** Born in 1960, he is a graduate of the Department of Law, Southwest University of Political Science and Law and joined work in 1984. He served 12 years in the public security apparatus of Sichuan and later from 2006 in Fujian, where he subsequently served as Secretary of the Provincial Discipline Inspection Commission. He was brought to Beijing in 2012 by Xi Jinping as Deputy Secretary of the Central

Discipline Inspection Commission till his appointment in November 2016 as Minister of State Security.

- vii. **Tang Yijun:** A former Governor of Liaoning, Tang Yijun was formally appointed as China's new Minister of Justice by the NPC Standing Committee on April 29, 2020. It is significant that he was invited to attend the first meeting of the 'Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group' on April 21, though he was at that time only Acting Minister of Justice. Tang Yijun spent the first 40 years of his career in Zhejiang eventually becoming its Deputy Party Secretary and later Governor of Liaoning since October 2017. Zhejiang is one Xi Jinping's key power bases and this, along with Tang Yijun being promoted twice in two and a half years, strongly suggests that he is Xi Jinping's ally.
- viii. **Wang Ning:** A highly decorated military officer, 1955-born General Wang Ning was brought to the PAPF from the PLA in December 2013 when Xi Jinping undertook a major reshuffle of the PAPF. PAPF Commander Wang Ning, who has worked with Xi Jinping in Fujian, participated in the Sino-Vietnam War on the Yunnan border.
- ix. **Wang Renhua:** His appointment to this sensitive position indicates he is trusted by Xi Jinping and the CMC leadership. Little else is yet known about him.

6. Armed with wide ranging powers, the 'Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group' certainly reports directly and only to Xi Jinping. It appears similar to a Central Small Leading Group, but is chaired by a Politburo member. While little is presently known of its functions, it will probably investigate cases and decide on punishments in secrecy while reporting to, and obtaining approvals directly from, Xi Jinping.

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