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'XI JINPING REINFORCES SECURITY APPARATUS AMIDST GROWING POPULAR DISCONTENT'

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The slowing economy and increasing joblessness have contributed to the growing popular discontent in China. This has affected China's entrepreneurs and there are indications that discontent has spread also to the 'princelings' and cadres in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The uncovering recently of corruption in the senior echelons of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and punishments to those found guilty will add to the number of discontented elements. While Chinese President Xi Jinping and the CCP leadership have been increasingly emphasising security and stability, Xi Jinping has simultaneously been strengthening China's security apparatus.

2. The threats perceived by China's leaders were highlighted in a statement by China's Ministry of State Security (MoSS) on its WeChat account on August 15, 2023, which declared that "Political security directly relates to the stability of political power and the survival of the system, and is the most essential need and the foundation for a country's survival and development. National security is impossible without political security". It stressed that "the core of political security lies in the security of the political power and system, which is to uphold the leadership and ruling status of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and safeguard the socialist system with Chinese characteristics". The MoSS also pointed out that safeguarding political security will be the primary task, while coordinating efforts to strengthen security in all other areas such as military and territorial security, as well as non-traditional. One concern, it identified the centrally administered , were the persistent efforts by various hostile forces to instigate 'colour revolutions' across China posing a real danger and long-term harm to China's political security.

3. To contain and curb the spread of dissatisfaction, Xi Jinping has enlarged the security apparatus and expanded its scope as well as placed 'loyalists' to head the security-related organisations. Telling is that China's apex security body, the National Security Commission, which is chaired by Chinese President Xi Jinping, has Premier Li Qiang and Politburo Standing Committee member and Director of the important CCP CC General Office, Cai Qi -- both long time confidants and loyalists of Xi Jinping -- as its two Vice Chairmen. Chairing the first meeting of the Central National Security Commission (CNSC) on May 30, 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for accelerated efforts to modernise the country's national security system and capacity. The meeting was attended by PBSC members Li Qiang, Zhao Leji and Cai Qi, who are deputy heads of the CNSC. By August, the centrally administered Chongqing Municipality announced an expanded national anti-espionage law and the MoSS welcomed the move and

indicated that the law will soon be made applicable in all provinces and Autonomous Regions in China. It also urged people to be on the lookout for spies and report them.

4. At the Central level, in 2023 just prior to the 20th Party Congress, Xi Jinping curtailed the authority of the five other Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) members to appoint and pay staff members and authorised the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) to monitor members of the CCP CC Politburo. The MPS and MoSS have both reportedly increased their nationwide personnel strength three-fold. Xi Jinping has also encouraged them to harness technology to reinforce efficacy. For instance the Director of Public Security of Sichuan Province announced in April 2023 that the province became the first to build a new generation of public security information network and build a police cloud computing platform that integrates the whole police. The MPS also has a technology centre, where “the latest scientific, technical and technological developments” aligned with police missions are developed. Chinese President Xi Jinping has additionally added at least two organisations to the national security apparatus, namely the ‘Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group’ and the CCP’s Social Work Department.

5. The security-related organisations under the CCP and State Council are all, except the CNSC, under the CCP CC's Political and Legal Affairs Commission (PLAC). They are the:

- i) National Security Commission (CNSC), which was initially proposed in 1997, but finally established in 2013;
- ii) PLAC with subordinate offices across the country down to the county level;
- iii) State Supervision Commission (with subordinate offices across the country down to the county level);
- iv) The ‘Safe China Construction Coordinating Small Group’, established in April 2020 and chaired by Xi Jinping. Its wide ambit includes preventing “activities that endanger the political security of the country”.
- v) Ministry of Public Security (MPS) with a network of subordinate offices across the country down to the village level and which is augmented by inputs from informers and the ubiquitous ‘neighbourhood committees’;
- vi) Ministry of State Security (MoSS) which is authorised to conduct espionage operations abroad in addition to counter-espionage operations domestically and, of late, investigate financial matters. Over the past two years it has become more active and adopted a higher public profile;
- vii) United Front Work Department (UFWD) -- after Xi Jinping took over as Chairman of the United Front Central Small Leading Group in 2016, he doubled its budget and personnel strength. The UFWD's scope of duties was expanded to include surveillance of Chinese dissidents abroad, Chinese students studying abroad, and recruiting and winning over influential people and opinion-makers abroad in addition to members of ethnic Chinese minorities like Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongols. It is now reported to function more closely with China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).
- viii) International Liaison Department (ILD).

ix) CCP's Social Work Department, which was re-established in 2023. This office was set up by Mao Zedong as an Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence unit within the CCP. Its charter is not entirely public except to deepen the Party's reach in society. Its head is 60-year-old Wu Hansheng, who has spent most of his career in the Central and State Organs Working Committee (CSOWC) and its predecessor organizations. He is a close associate and one time chief of staff of Politburo Standing Committee member Li Xi,

6. Announcing the enlarged scope of the security apparatus last year while on an inspection of Jiangxi province, Politburo member and Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission Chen Wenqing said political-legal organs should "address risks in public finance", strengthen "internet governance", and contribute to "new development pattern", among other things.

7. An expansion of the domestic security apparatus was visible since the end of 2023 when Municipalities began setting up Armed Police Departments. Apart from being a clear indication of the widespread and spreading discontent in China, these departments will augment the police and security apparatus. On September 28, 2023, the Shanghai Municipal Investment Corporation established a People's Armed Forces Department responsible for "security and emergency management". Subsequently at least 12 other municipal investment bureaus in China have followed Shanghai's example and done the same, including in the Wuhan and Huizhou Municipalities. Many of these investment bureaus are already heavily in debt and facing default. All the Armed Police Departments are nominally charged with maintaining social stability and order. Radio Free Asia reported (October 3) that the new people's armed forces departments are being rapidly established not only in municipal investment bureaus, but also in at least 23 of China's state-owned enterprises.

8. These efforts are being augmented by engaging the public in security work. In a WeChat article published on August 1, the MoSS said that security agencies would "need the broad participation of the people and their joint prevention" to tackle the current "grim and complex" state of anti-espionage efforts. Consequent to the reduction last year in wages of security personnel by up to 20 percent, the authorities, in an apparent bid to offset any consequent laxity in discipline and effectiveness of the security personnel, introduced a "whistle-blowers" programme to help maintain social stability. On October 25, the authorities of Beijing's Tongzhou District issued confidential documents to various industries and offered rewards to encourage people to provide "hints of instability". The documents explain that intelligence clues combined with the results of actual application have different levels of rewards for the whistle-blowers. From first-class clues to fourth-class clues and other clues, rewards range from 10,000 yuan to 500 yuan. The final reward amount will be determined based on the actual effect. If multiple people report the same clue, only the first citizen to report will be rewarded. Posts on social media by citizens critical of the programme say that the "Big Whistleblowing Campaign" is the fifth largest intelligence organization in China after the "Chaoyang Masses", "Xicheng Aunt", "Haidian Netizens" and the "Fengtai Persuasion Team". Some netizens feared that this campaign to involve citizens in maintenance of stability will lead to the recurrence of the mutual revelations of the Cultural Revolution, and the emergence of a large number of so-called "secret agents" and will help the CCP divert social conflicts and consolidate its power.

9. The MoSS has also enlarged the scope of its activities. Since last year it began publicising its success in uncovering espionage cases involving an MI6 officer inside China, neutralising an espionage effort near a critical Chinese Navy base, and arresting a software engineer working for foreign intelligence. An article in the South China Morning Post (December 24) disclosed that China is building up private security to protect overseas interests in hostile, unstable regions. It said conflicts have necessitated that Beijing make new contingency plans to safeguard Chinese interests abroad. At a seminar in early December, jointly held by the China-Africa Business Council and the MoSS-affiliated China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, participants pushed for Chinese firms to become more internationalised, more localised with regional staff and political support, and more commercialised. The seminar saw the presence of some large domestic security companies, including Huayuan Security Guard; Dewe Security, a subsidiary of Hong Kong-listed Frontier Services Group; Huaxin Zhongan Group; Shanghai-listed Anbang Save-Guard Group; representatives from the China Security Association; and others. Officials from China's foreign ministry attended the conference and the MoSS said it would ensure the security of China's overseas mining projects, personnel and assets, adding it is ready "to ensure the safety of Chinese companies 'going global', and safeguard the security of key mineral-resource supply chains." Many of the private security companies have recruited ex-PLA or police personnel.

10. These efforts to strengthen the security apparatus, and especially the use of technologies like facial recognition, amid growing popular discontent have been criticised by some Chinese. Many have resented the use of technologies like facial recognition. At a 2-day Global Public Security Cooperation Forum in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province on September 21, Xu Jin, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said Beijing should be cautious about going too far on security, do more research and be more flexible in its approach. He said, "While pursuing security goals, it needs to take into account the needs of different stakeholders, especially by giving adequate attention to vulnerable groups." He said there was a dilemma for policymakers trying to find the right balance on public security, adding that excessive measures could result in "wasted resources, panic among the public and inappropriate policies".

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