

China creates new National Security Committee

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In a move to strengthen President Xi Jinping's authority, the recently concluded third plenum of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee has moved to create a National Security Committee. The body, widely thought to be modelled on National Security Councils in the US and Russia, will bring China's military, intelligence, public security, and foreign policy agencies under Xi's direct control.

There are two impulses behind the new National Security Committee (NSC). First, the CCP leadership, representing the interests of a tiny layer of billionaires and multi-millionaires, is acutely conscious that it is sitting on a social time bomb, and the government is strengthening the police and other repressive apparatuses to suppress any revolt by the working class. Second, it is part of China's preparations for war, in response to the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia"—a campaign to militarily and diplomatically isolate and contain China.

Li Wei, director of the "anti-terrorism study center" at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations spoke with the *Beijing Times* last week about the considerations behind the NSC: "The status and influence of China has become increasingly important in international relations. The possibility of an unknown emergency is rising, so setting up a national-level institution to respond to crisis is highly necessary". Li added, "Currently, the power of protecting national security has been dispersed among a variety of departments, both political and military, and there is a lack of a top-level management institution to cope with an unexpected crisis."

The NSC indicates that President Xi has consolidated his power and will be more authoritarian than his predecessors. Ever since the 1980s, there have been attempts to create a central national security body, but

no leader from Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao succeeded.

The proposal was most seriously considered in 1997 after former President Jiang Zemin visited the US and saw the working of its National Security Council. However, as Liu Shanying of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told Associated Press, "Jiang had not yet been able to establish his power and status to the extent that was needed to set up the committee at the time. One cannot set up the committee and coordinate the resources unless he has established and consolidated his power already."

Under Hu's presidency, Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang was in charge of state security. His successor, Meng Jianzhu, is now only a Politburo member, not in the standing committee. This lowering of the state security profile is bound up not just with Xi's centralisation of power but also with Zhou's support for the currently imprisoned former Politburo member, Bo Xilai. Zhou, aligned with the so-called "oil faction" within the bureaucracy, has extensive influence over the huge state-owned energy companies. Several of his protégés in these oil companies were detained earlier this year over corruption allegations, apparently as part of Xi's efforts to undermine the "vested interests" in the large state firms and clear the way for the full privatisation of these entities.

Wily Lam, an expert on CCP politics at Chinese University of Hong Kong, told Associated Press that the NSC will make Xi's leadership "more like a presidency", with "almost total control over the military, the police and other military forces."

Xi is believed to have far stronger connections with the military than either Hu or Jiang, because his father Xi Zhongxun was a former general and vice premier during the Mao era. Xi immediately took over the

chairmanship of the Central Military Commission when he was installed as the new general secretary at the 18th CCP congress in November 2012. The president frequently inspects naval bases, command centres and military technology institutes. He also drew his nationalistic slogan, “the Chinese Dream”, from the title of a hawkish military officer’s book that called for a military build up to match the US in the coming decades.

The new NSC has been formed just as the Japanese Diet is about to approve a similar National Security Council proposed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Both are a sign of growing regional tensions caused by Washington’s “pivot to Asia” policy that has encouraged Japan’s re-militarisation. The Japanese press immediately drew the conclusion that the new Chinese NSC was aimed at strengthening China’s position against Japan in their maritime territorial disputes.

The Chinese media has discussed the NSC as part of broader military reforms in the face of a worsening “security environment”. The old military command structure, divided into seven “Military Regions”, mainly to resist the threat of a large-scale invasion of China during the Cold War, no longer fits the new strategic situation, analysts said. With an expanding navy, a modernising air force and ballistic missile units, new emphasis is being placed on “mobile combined warfare” and “offensive operations”, requiring the creation of a “joint combat command” similar to the US Pacific Command, operating not only within China but overseas.

Xi’s “Chinese Dream” means that the already limited government spending on healthcare, education and rural subsidies will be drained by an expanding military budget, which at \$US115 billion this year is already the world’s second largest. Since 2009, following the global financial crisis, China’s domestic security spending has been outpacing even the military budget, a clear sign that the regime regards the country’s working class as a greater threat than the war machine of US imperialism.

The CCP’s latest plenum has decided to implement sweeping pro-market measures, privatising thousands of the remaining secondary state-owned enterprises and enacting land reform that will drive millions more rural poor into the cities as a new source of cheap labour.

Unlike the restructuring in the 1990s that destroyed tens of millions of jobs in the state sector, the global economic crisis means that China’s export sector is now unable to absorb a huge influx of rural labour. Unemployment is set to rapidly escalate.

Xi is consolidating the security forces amid mounting signs of social unrest. On the eve of the CCP plenum, the party’s headquarters in Taiyuan, the provincial capital of Shanxi province, was bombed. The attack was apparently carried out by a man who was forcibly evicted from his home by government authorities to promote real estate development. A week earlier, three Uighurs from Xinjiang drove a car into crowds in the politically sensitive Tiananmen Square, before they set their vehicle on fire, killing themselves and two bystanders. The top military commander in Xinjiang was immediately removed in response.



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