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Implications for the PLA and Domestic Security Forces

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CT-503

Testimony presented before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on February 7, 2019.



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Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

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The Consolidation of Political Power in China Under Xi Jinping: Implications for the PLA and Domestic Security Forces

Testimony of Timothy R. Heath¹
The RAND Corporation²

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

February 7, 2019

This testimony examines how the concentration of political power in China under President Xi Jinping affects its military and domestic security forces. For context, I will briefly review the broader background trends against which Chinese leaders, headed by Xi, have consolidated political power. I will then explore how these trends have affected China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the implications for the country's domestic security forces, most notably the People's Armed Police (PAP), the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and the Ministry of State Security (MSS).

The current centralizing trends might aggravate tensions within China's armed forces and worsen bureaucratic deadlock. However, I assess that these measures also have increased central government control of the security apparatus, removed many opponents of Xi's authority in the security forces, and facilitated military modernization efforts. The centralization of authority in the security forces does carry some important considerations for U.S. defense planners and officials, some of which I will review in my recommendations.

Broad Developments Under Xi

Under Xi, who serves concurrently as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary and the chair of the Central Military Commission (CMC), China has experienced a striking consolidation of power. This consolidation involves three important trends.

First, central authorities have accrued political power at the expense of bureaucratic ministries and local and provincial governments. An ambitious intergovernmental fiscal reform

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program will increase the role of the central government.³ Similarly, an array of supragovernment small groups, such as the National Security Commission and the Leading Small Group for Comprehensive Deepening of Reform, have been established to guide the work of ministries.⁴

Second, the CCP has dramatically expanded its powers, generally at the expense of the government and other organizations. A major reform plan announced in March 2018 transferred responsibilities from various government ministries to party organizations. As one example, management of all films, media, and publications has been transferred from a government office to the CCP's Propaganda Ministry.⁵ Earlier this year, China also established a new antigraft agency, the National Supervisory Commission, which replaced the State Council's Ministry of Supervision and merged with the party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI). This move aims to strengthen the party's anticorruption effort in nonparty sectors.⁶ The CCP has also stepped up its efforts to penetrate private-sector businesses as well as foreign firms operating in China.⁷

Third, the central leadership has undertaken measures to bolster Xi's personal authority. Xi has taken the helm of the most important small leading groups and commissions.⁸ In March 2018, the National People's Congress, China's national legislature, voted nearly unanimously to amend the constitution to remove presidential term limits.⁹ Official propaganda has relentlessly promoted Xi in a manner that many have compared to a "cult of personality."¹⁰ In addition, Xi's antigraft campaign has allowed him to crush potential rivals.¹¹

Official documents state that these centralizing actions aim to address two key issues: a slowing economy and the rising expectations of an increasingly educated, prosperous people. In 2017, the 19th Party Congress, a gathering of the CCP's highest-level body held every five years, declared the country's most essential challenge to be the contradiction "between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life." To ensure its long-term political survival, the CCP must both overhaul the country's mode of economic

³ Philippe Wingender, "Intergovernmental Fiscal Reform in China," IMF Working Paper, WP/18/88, April 2018.

⁴ Cary Huang, "How Leading Small Groups Help Xi Jinping and Other Party Leaders Exert Power," *South China Morning Post*, January 20, 2014.

⁵ Chris Buckley, "China Gives Communist Party More Control Over Policy and Media," *New York Times*, March 21, 2018.

⁶ Jamie P. Horsley, "What's So Controversial About China's New Anti-Corruption Body?" *The Diplomat*, May 31, 2018.

⁷ Simon Denyer, "Command and Control: China's Communist Party Extends Reach Into Foreign Companies," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2018.

⁸ Javier C. Hernández, "China's 'Chairman of Everything': Behind Xi Jinping's Many Titles," *New York Times*, October 25, 2017.

⁹ Chris Buckley and Steven Lee Myers, "China's Legislature Blesses Xi's Indefinite Rule. It Was 2,958 to 2," *New York Times*, March 11, 2018.

¹⁰ Philip Wen and Christian Shepherd, "China Cranks Propaganda, Xi Jinping's Cult of Personality into Overdrive Ahead of Party Congress," *Business Insider*, October 12, 2017.

¹¹ "China's Anti-Corruption Campaign Expands with New Agency," BBC, March 20, 2018.

growth and deliver a higher standard of living to the people.¹² However, realizing these goals requires the party to dismantle obsolete industries, governance structures, and patronage networks that oppose change.¹³ The “fragmented” nature of China’s authoritarian rule might have facilitated rapid growth in previous decades, but Chinese leaders increasingly view it as an impediment to systemic reform.¹⁴ Xi and his allies, frustrated by the glacial pace of change under Hu Jintao, accordingly embraced a highly centralized, top-down approach to systemic reform that they called “top down design.”¹⁵

The centralization of Xi’s political power may therefore be understood as part of the CCP’s strategy to minimize open conflict while realizing structural changes and overcoming resistance by vested interests. Beijing’s resolve to power through such an inherently contentious process underscores its resolve to realize the country’s revitalization as a great power. The inherent risks attendant to this process underscore the growing importance of the nation’s security forces to contemporary Chinese politics.

The party’s centralization of political power in pursuit of its reform agenda has elevated the importance of security forces in domestic politics in a manner not seen since perhaps the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. China’s armed forces have always provided the mailed fist underpinning CCP rule, but for most of the 1990s and 2000s, rapid economic growth and general consensus among political elites enabled security forces to easily manage incidents of mass unrest. In a period of growing plenty, Beijing focused on furthering the country’s impressive economic expansion and allowed corruption to fester in the armed forces—as it did in much of Chinese officialdom.

However, slower growth and rising personal economic expectations have created a more rancorous political situation. Central authorities can no longer afford to tolerate the malfeasance and pervasive corruption that squanders economic growth and infuriates the public. Powerful elites who benefited from past policies have resisted changes that might threaten their status and privileges. Symptomatic of the troubled state of affairs are the numerous media reports of unverified rumors of coup plots against Xi—something virtually unheard of in either Jiang Zemin or Hu’s eras.¹⁶ Firm control of the nation’s armed forces is critical if leaders are to deter powerful central or local officials from coopting troops to defy Beijing. Loyal and competent troops are also essential to control western provinces in support of the country’s economic development plans. Externally, China’s growing tensions with some Asian neighbors and with the United States have increased the need for military readiness and competence. Central leaders

¹² Alice Lyman Miller, “Only Socialism Can Save China; Only Xi Jinping Can Save Socialism,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 56, May 17, 2018.

¹³ “China 2030: Building a Modern, Harmonious, and Creative Society,” *World Bank*, February 27, 2012.

¹⁴ Zhenjie Yang, “Fragmented Authoritarianism—The Facilitator Behind the Chinese Reform Miracle: A Case Study in Central China,” *China Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2013, pp. 4–13.

¹⁵ Barry Naughton, “Leadership Transition and the ‘Top Level Design’ of Economic Reform,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 37, April 30, 2012.

¹⁶ “Chinese President Xi Jinping ‘Foiled Coup Plot’ to Seize Control of Communist Party,” *Radio Free Asia*, October 20, 2017.

led by Xi thus face powerful incentives to ensure both the absolute loyalty of the country's military and internal security forces against potential enemies, both foreign and domestic.

Consolidation of CCP Power in the Military

As the party's armed wing, the PLA remains the ultimate backstop of party authority. Multiple levels of commissars, party committees, and inspection cadres penetrate all levels of the military, providing an interlocking, reinforcing system that infuses party authority throughout the PLA. Most military officers are party members, and units at the company level and above have political officers responsible for ensuring that party orders are carried out. Party committees oversee decisionmaking in military units, and party inspection cadres monitor the behavior of personnel.¹⁷

Key Civil-Military Developments Drive Centralization of CCP Power

Yet despite these organizational designs, Chinese leaders appear never to take the military's loyalty for granted. In the years prior to Xi's ascent, some reason for concern could be seen in reports that elements of the PLA resisted the authority of top leaders. Reports from the Hu and Jiang eras described a bloated military riddled with corruption and ill-prepared to carry out its responsibilities. A brief review of key civil-military developments provides critical context for the party's approach to the PLA under Xi.

PLA autonomy. Alarming evidence of the military's resistance to civilian oversight could be seen in the disturbing incident of senior general Gu Junshan's arrest in 2012. Hu reportedly ordered an inquiry into corruption charges against Gu, but CMC officials failed to discharge their duties. Hu had to direct the CCDI to carry out the inquiry, a move that underscored the unreliability of the PLA's own disciplinary units.¹⁸

Potential involvement in elite politics. The possibility of powerful political leaders conspiring with PLA units raised itself in the Politburo aspirant Bo Xilai's shocking downfall in 2012. News reports have suggested elements of the 14th Group Army had supported Bo's bid for power.¹⁹

Corruption. Corruption in the PLA festered throughout both Jiang and Hu's tenure, especially among individuals involved with the lucrative logistics and personnel sectors. In 2006, reports emerged that former PLA Navy Deputy Commander Vice-Admiral Wang Shouye siphoned off 160 million yuan when he was a General Logistics Department deputy director.²⁰

¹⁷ Defense Intelligence Agency, *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, DIA-02-1706-085, January 2019, p. 16. As of January 25, 2019: http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf

¹⁸ John Garnaut, "Rotting from Within," *Foreign Policy*, April 16, 2012.

¹⁹ Jeremy Page and Lingling Wei, "Bo's Ties to Army Alarmed Beijing," *Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2012.

²⁰ Jonathan Watts, "Mistress Turns in Corrupt Chinese Vice Admiral," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2006.

The large-scale arrests and the subsequent downfall of two CMC vice chairmen, Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, under Xi hinted at the extent of the corruption problem.²¹

Outdated organization. In addition to corruption problems, Jiang and Hu presided over a PLA that continued to prioritize ground forces, despite the adoption of a doctrine that called for the military to fight as an integrated, joint force in 2004. Moreover, the PLA's entire command and control system reflected an obsolete, Soviet-based construct poorly suited to the needs of a modern combat force.²²

In short, the PLA's organizational, political, and disciplinary problems posed a formidable obstacle to Xi's pursuit of the military's readiness, loyalty, and political reliability. Xi assumed command of a military that carried an elevated risk of military insubordination and potential operational failure at a time when the central leadership's need for an utterly reliable backstop was reaching new heights.

Measures to Strengthen Military Loyalty, Discipline, and Professionalism

China's central leaders, led by Xi, have enacted a series of measures to strengthen the military's loyalty, discipline, and professionalism. These include organizational reforms, administrative measures, a widespread purge of the military carried out under the name of anticorruption, strengthened regulatory regimes, and appeals to the PLA's corporate interest.

Organizational reforms. Organizational changes strengthened central oversight of the military while bolstering discipline and promoting military competence. For example, the separation of the PLA's operational command and administrative functions in 2015 could improve efficiency *and* reduce the risks of delegating too much power to key commanders.²³ Similarly, the creation of the National Security Commission in 2013 centralized decisionmaking regarding military affairs, improving prospects for coordination and reinforcing the military's subordination to central authorities. The 2014 combination of maritime law enforcement agencies into the State Oceanic Administration and the Chinese Coast Guard again both streamlined command and control and increased political oversight.²⁴

Other measures strengthened party authority within the military and improved discipline but might have less direct impact on military professionalism. In November 2015, authorities announced the creation of a new PLA Politics and Law Commission to monitor compliance with antigraft provisions and other rules, mirroring a similar party organization that oversees legal and judicial issues in the state bureaucracy.²⁵

²¹ "Chinese General Guo Boxiong Sentenced to Life for Corruption," BBC, July 25, 2016.

²² Michael S. Chase, Jeffrey Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, Kristin A. Gunness, Scott Warren Harold, Susan Puska, and Samuel K. Berkowitz, *China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-893-USCC, 2015.

²³ Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications," *China Strategic Perspectives*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, No. 10, March 2017.

²⁴ Liu Zhen, "China's Military Police Given Control of Coast Guard as Beijing Boosts Maritime Security," *South China Morning Post*, March 21, 2018.

²⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016," Washington, D.C., April 2016.

Regulatory mechanisms. Under Xi, the PLA also has introduced an array of regulatory measures and rules. Some, reflecting broader party efforts, target corruption and aim to instill discipline. Other regulations support professionalization by outlining requirements for training and preparations as a joint military.²⁶

Propaganda. PLA media has promoted the message of the military's absolute loyalty to the party, a theme amplified by Xi's 2014 conference on the topic.²⁷ While commentators have speculated on the reason for the relentless emphasis on the PLA's loyalty to the party, it is worth noting that this theme has been exceedingly common over the past decades.²⁸ Under Xi, the theme of PLA loyalty to the party complements the other organizational, administrative, and other measures designed to reinforce discipline and control corruption. The message of military subordination to party authority is also not necessarily incompatible with the military's development as a professional, competent force. Because the CCP has defined its mission in terms of the defense of the nation's interests, fulfillment of that mission is best served by a professional, competent military.

Anticorruption. Xi initiated an extensive anticorruption purge that netted many senior officials, including the two former CMC vice chairs. In 2017, authorities carried out unprecedented anticorruption probes against two sitting CMC members, Joint Staff Department chief Fang Fenghui and Political Work Department director Zhang Yang.²⁹ The anticorruption campaign has also provided a useful pretext for Xi to remove political adversaries and eliminate potential opposition among senior leaders.³⁰

Incentives to support Xi's authority. Xi has not only enacted punitive measures to impose discipline, he has also offered incentives. Professional-minded officers and troops likely favor anticorruption efforts and systemic reforms to improve PLA lethality and readiness. Xi has reviewed several key military parades and exercises, and he has assiduously courted the military with onsite visits and promotions of loyal officers.³¹ In addition, Xi's adoption of hardline policies on sovereignty disputes, such as the enactment of the Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea and the vigorous defense of the military's buildup in the South China Sea, elevates the status of the military as the protector of the nation's interests.³²

Another incentive may be withholding investigations into some senior military officers, as corruption is likely so pervasive that most senior officers actually could be targeted. Some observers have noted how graft probes have largely avoided targeting military-region grade

²⁶ "Revised Rules Set for Evolving PLA," *China Daily*, April 16, 2018.

²⁷ "Party Commands Gun Must Be Upheld," *China Military Online*, November 3, 2014.

²⁸ James Mulvenon, "They Protest Too Much (or Too Little) Methinks: Soldier Protests, Party Control of the Army, and the 'National Army' Debate," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 15, August 2005.

²⁹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018," Washington, D.C., May 2018.

³⁰ Charles Clover, "Xi Takes Aim at Military in Anti-Graft Drive," *Financial Times*, February 11, 2018.

³¹ Charlotte Gao, "China's Military Parade Reaffirms Communist Party's Absolute Control Over Army," *The Diplomat*, August 1, 2017.

³² "China Says U.S. Should Respect China's Air Defense Zone," Reuters, March 23, 2017.

officers, suggesting Xi may have calibrated a degree of restraint to avoid a backlash from commanders in charge of operational units and to minimize damage to morale.³³

Assessing Xi's Measures

Given the serious problems plaguing the PLA under Hu and Jiang, the measures taken by Xi will likely improve the military's political reliability, discipline, and professional competence. Although the anticorruption campaign threatens some senior military officers, Xi's assiduous cultivation of the interests of the military and security forces and various organizational, administrative, political, and other measures have significantly reduced the possibility that disaffected military personnel could conspire against the central government. However, the tension between the pursuit of political loyalty and military readiness persists, and the dangers should not be dismissed. Too much loyalty building through extensive indoctrination and intimidation could result in a military that prioritizes compliance and sloganeering over professional competence. In contrast, too much focus on improving military readiness and professionalism through purging all leaders tainted by corruption risks damaging morale and potentially inciting rebellion among those targeted.

Domestic Security Forces: The PAP

The PLA provides a critical backstop to the party's rule, but the domestic security forces play a more-critical role in managing day-to-day opposition to CCP authority among elites and the general public. The PAP is a paramilitary component of China's armed forces; its primary mission is internal security. Although the PAP has specialized units for a variety of functions, such as border security and firefighting, most units address internal security. PAP units are organized into contingents for each province, autonomous region, and centrally administered city. There are also a small number of mobile divisions available to deploy anywhere in the country to respond to crises.³⁴

As with the PLA, news reports from the Hu era illuminated disturbing PAP practices that likely inspired central leaders to tighten control. In particular, reports that local officials coopted PAP troops to carry out a variety of extralegal tasks raised the possibility that disaffected local leaders could direct local PAP units to resist central authority. For example, media in the mid-2000s mentioned incidents in which local officials sent PAP troops to carry out tax collection and debt recovery and to seize land. Corrupt officials also deployed local PAP troops to break up protests against misrule.³⁵ Perhaps the most striking example of local officials deploying PAP troops for purposes of political violence occurred in 2012, when then-Chongqing Party chief Bo

³³ James Char, "Reclaiming the Party's Control of the Gun: Bringing Civilian Authority Back in China's Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 608–636.

³⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018, p. 48.

³⁵ John Lee, "PAP: The Rise of the Party's Army," *China Brief*, Vol. 8, No. 13, June 19, 2008.

Xilai sent PAP troops to capture his ex-police chief, Wang Lijun, who had fled to the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu.³⁶

To curb such abuses, central leaders strengthened central control of the PAP with a series of organizational and administrative measures. The PAP underwent a leadership reshuffle in 2014 that saw its commander and political commissar replaced with PLA officers loyal to Xi.³⁷ In 2017, authorities announced that the PAP would be commanded by the CMC, removing the State Council from the chain of command and removing the PAP from the direct control of provincial authorities.³⁸ Moreover, the reforms removed all troops not involved in domestic security duties from the PAP. Following the reform, the PAP has become a force exclusively focused on domestic security that operates under the command of the CMC. Other types of PAP troops, such as firefighting and border defense, have been transferred to other central ministries.³⁹

Authorities also revised PAP funding to strengthen central control. Mirroring the organizational and administrative changes, the central government began to almost exclusively fund the PAP, thereby removing local and provincial funding streams.⁴⁰

Stronger central control of the PAP removes these troops from possible misuse by local power holders, deters potential challengers to Beijing's authority, and enables the central government to deploy the forces to carry out its own strategic plans, such as consolidation of political control over the western provinces. However, the militarization of the PAP raises the prospect that domestic security concerns will be considered in military terms, further weakening what little remains of the rights of Chinese citizens, especially in the ethnic-minority dominated provinces featuring a heavy PAP presence.

The MPS and MSS

Chinese leaders rely on the MPS and the MSS as the primary forces for ensuring public order and controlling threats in the country. The MPS is responsible for domestic law enforcement, as well as overall maintenance of "social order," riot control, and antiterror duties. Unlike the PAP or PLA, however, the MPS provides oversight of local police forces, most of which are controlled and funded by local and provincial officials. Locally hired Chinese police forces are generally regarded as poorly paid, poorly trained, and corrupt.⁴¹

The MSS is the country's main civilian intelligence and counterintelligence agency. Its missions include protecting China's national security, securing political and social stability,

³⁶ Viola Zhou, "Why China's Armed Police Will Now Only Take Orders from Xi and His Generals," *South China Morning Post*, December 28, 2017.

³⁷ Kristen Huang, "China Brings People's Armed Police Under Control of Top Military Chiefs," *South China Morning Post*, December 27, 2017.

³⁸ Ben Blanchard, "China to Bring Paramilitary Police Force Under Military's Wing," Reuters, December 27, 2017.

³⁹ Zi Yang, "The Militarization of China's People's Armed Police," *Asia Times*, March 25, 2018.

⁴⁰ Adrian Zenz, "China's Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data," *China Brief*, Vol. 18, No. 4, March 12, 2018.

⁴¹ "A Policeman's Lot in a Police State: Not Happy," *The Economist*, October 31, 2016.

conducting counterintelligence, and implementing the State Security Law and related laws.⁴² The 31 provincial and municipal departments of the MSS are responsible for carrying out surveillance and domestic intelligence work. Some of the departments also carry out foreign intelligence work.⁴³

As with the PLA and PAP, the MPS has experienced issues of corruption and misuse of forces in the Hu and Jiang eras. At the national level, the arrest of Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission Chair Zhou Yongkang in 2012 revealed the presence of extensive corruption and factional scheming in the security apparatus. Zhou's downfall permitted Xi to consolidate control over the internal security apparatus, ensuring no other rival could deploy these forces against Xi.

Xi has accordingly directed efforts to strengthen central control over the MPS and MSS. Following the downfall of Zhou, for example, authorities downgraded the position in status. In 2018, Xi attended a conference of security officials, during which he passed on directives aimed at strengthening the loyalty of all personnel in the security agencies to the CCP.⁴⁴

In addition to disciplinary measures to ensure the subordination and loyalty of security forces, authorities have also increased their budgets. Spending on domestic security increased significantly under Xi, building on trends stemming from Hu's tenure. In 2010, China's national domestic security spending exceeded its spending on external defense for the first time.⁴⁵ According to some estimates, on a purchasing power parity basis, China's domestic security spending in 2017 was equivalent to about \$349 billion, more than double the United States' estimated \$165 billion.⁴⁶

Besides major increases in spending, security officials have adopted advanced technologies for surveillance and security purposes, such as facial recognition and "social credit" rating schemes through information technologies.⁴⁷

In sum, the MSS and MPS have seen an increase in budgets and capacity. Xi has also secured control of their national-level leadership. The increasing expansion of law enforcement capabilities and international outreach raises the risk that Chinese security forces will extend their hunt for political opposition abroad.⁴⁸ Already, requests by Chinese police officials to

⁴² Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2016, p. 71.

⁴³ Peter Mattis, "Everything We Know About China's Secretive State Security Bureau," *War on the Rocks*, July 9, 2017.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Gao, "Xi Stresses the Party's Absolute Leadership Over Political and Legal Work," *The Diplomat*, January 23, 2018.

⁴⁵ Chris Buckley, "China Internal Security Spending Jumps Past Army Budget," Reuters, March 4, 2011.

⁴⁶ Zenz, 2018.

⁴⁷ Josh Chin, "China Spends More on Domestic Security as Xi's Powers Grow," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2018.

⁴⁸ Chris Buckley, "China's Antigraft Enforcers Take on a New Role: Policing Loyalty," *New York Times*, October 22, 2016.

establish extradition agreements has raised concern that the MSS and MPS may serve as vehicles for capturing political dissidents.⁴⁹

Conclusions

Under Xi, the CCP has stepped up central control of the country's armed forces as a critical component of a contentious economic and governance reform program. Compared to the situation under Hu and Jiang, the array of administrative, organizational, budgetary, and political measures have likely resulted in stronger central control and oversight of the military and internal security forces.

Beijing likely faces a low risk of open defiance of Xi's authority by disaffected elements in the military or cooptation of armed units by recalcitrant local elites. Despite the fact that senior PLA generals have been targeted and the autonomy of the PLA threatened to a far higher extent than in the past, the party has reduced the risks through a relentless anticorruption drive and intrusive organizational and administrative reforms led by Xi. Moreover, Xi's cultivation of the PLA's interests—through directing an overdue reorganization, promoting allies, and elevating the PLA's status through hardline policies—provides an incentive for the many professional-minded military personnel to comply with strengthened CCP authority.

The consolidation of political power has helped improve discipline and may finally curb rampant corruption, especially in the PLA. Better discipline, less corruption, and stronger CCP authority is not necessarily incompatible with a more professional, competent PLA. Nor is the onset of badly needed structural reforms inimical to the party's pursuit of a more-loyal, obedient force. On the contrary, Xi's role in initiating both military reorganization and the array of measures to bolster party authority and strengthen discipline underscores the interdependent nature of these efforts. The most probable outcome is a concomitant improvement in the loyalty, discipline, and competence of the military.

However, the concentration of political power over the military and domestic security forces carries some perils for Beijing. Although Xi has succeeded to date in calibrating coercion against corrupt senior leaders and personnel, the pervasiveness of the problem means the risk of desperate individuals driven to desperate measures cannot be discounted. Chinese leaders will need to continue balancing antigraft campaigning and rooting out opposition to reform with restraint to avoid driving threatened leaders into open defiance.

The concentration of power also carries a risk of decisionmaking bottlenecks. Elevating too many decisions to elite supraministerial small leading groups raises the risks that important decisions will be delayed or grow unpredictable. The lack of institutionalization of authority between new and old command structures also causes friction and could cause problems with coordination, deconfliction, and decisionmaking in a crisis. For example, some commentators

⁴⁹ Massoud Hayoun, "Is China Using Interpol to Try to Bring Back Political Dissidents from the U.S.?" *Pacific Standard Magazine*, September 27, 2017.

have attributed the apparent lack of activity in the National Security Commission to opposition by leaders in traditional ministries.⁵⁰

Finally, the blurring of political with military and legal concerns carries implications for countries who engage or find themselves in confrontations with Chinese forces. Officials will need to attend to the political dimensions of cooperation with Chinese police and other security forces. The merging of political and military concerns also could create uncertainty and unpredictability regarding Beijing's intentions and degree of involvement in potential international confrontations involving PLA forces. Central leadership's persistent efforts to better guide the activities of military and paramilitary forces in contentious situations elevates the likelihood that those forces undertake risky or provocative behavior under Beijing's direction. This raises unsettling and unpredictable possibilities for escalation in any crisis situation involving Chinese armed forces. For example, there is a higher likelihood under the current centralized command system that any provocative action, such as an attempted ramming by a Chinese Coast Guard ship of a U.S. maritime surveillance ship in the South China Sea, could be directed by Beijing.

Xi's centralization of political authority in the security forces carries some important considerations for U.S. policymakers. First, U.S. defense planners should account for the changing political dynamics when contemplating possible crisis situations involving the PLA. In some ways, stronger central oversight reduces risks that local commanders could be acting on their own. However, the same dynamic also raises the danger that provocative military actions may have the Chinese leadership's backing, introducing unpredictable escalation possibilities. Given the rising stakes, U.S. military officials should ensure robust "hotline" channels of communication for use in a crisis.

Second, U.S. officials should monitor China's law enforcement presence in western regions, such as Tibet and Xinjiang, for evidence of more abuses by PAP troops. Militarizing the PAP raises the possibility that local commanders will view law enforcement in military, as opposed to legal, terms. What remains of due process and the legal rights of Chinese citizens could deteriorate further at the hands of PAP occupation. U.S. officials should promote the publication of evidence of such abuses to pressure China into respecting human rights.

Third, U.S. officials should monitor efforts by Chinese police officials to train and build partnerships in other countries. Given the overlap of political and criminal concerns of a police force featuring strong CCP control, Chinese officials could be passing on practices and technologies that support political repression rather than promote sound law enforcement practices. U.S. officials should consider sanctioning Chinese officials who advance repression under the guise of law enforcement in their engagements with other countries.

⁵⁰ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "China's Institutional Changes in the Foreign and Security Policy Realm Under Xi Jinping: Power Concentration vs. Fragmentation Without Institutionalization," *East Asia*, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2017, pp. 113–131.