NBR ANALYSIS

FEBRUARY 2013

Intensifying Contradictions: Chinese Policing Enters the 21st Century

Introduction 3
Abraham M. Denmark

Intensifying Contradictions:
Chinese Policing Enters the 21st Century 7
Jonathan Walton

NBR THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH

THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH

The *NBR Analysis* (ISSN 1052-164X) offers timely essays on countries, events, and issues from recognized specialists. The views expressed in these essays are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of other NBR research associates or institutions that support NBR.

The National Bureau of Asian Research is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institution dedicated to informing and strengthening policy. NBR conducts advanced independent research on strategic, political, economic, globalization, health, and energy issues affecting U.S. relations with Asia. Drawing upon an extensive network of the world's leading specialists and leveraging the latest technology, NBR bridges the academic, business, and policy arenas. The institution disseminates its research through briefings, publications, conferences, Congressional testimony, and email forums, and by collaborating with leading institutions worldwide. NBR also provides exceptional internship opportunities to graduate and undergraduate students for the purpose of attracting and training the next generation of Asia specialists. NBR was started in 1989 with a major grant from the Henry M. Jackson Foundation.

Funding for NBR's research and publications comes from foundations, corporations, individuals, the U.S. government, and from NBR itself. NBR does not conduct proprietary or classified research. The organization undertakes contract work for government and private sector organizations only when NBR can maintain the right to publish findings from such work.

This report may be reproduced for personal use. Otherwise, the *NBR Analysis* may not be reproduced in full without the written permission of NBR. When information from NBR publications is cited or quoted, please cite the author and The National Bureau of Asian Research

To download issues of the *NBR Analysis,* please visit the NBR website http://www.nbr.org.

This is the 97th issue of the *NBR Analysis*.

NBR is a tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation under I.R.C. Sec. 501(c)(3), qualified to receive tax-exempt contributions.

© 2013 by The National Bureau of Asian Research.

Printed in the United States of America.

For further information about NBR, contact:

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF ASIAN RESEARCH
1414 NE 42ND STREET, SUITE 300
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98105
206-632-7370 PHONE
206-632-7487 FAX
NBR@NBR.ORG E-MAIL
HTTP://WWW.NBR.ORG

Introduction

Abraham M. Denmark

Abraham M. Denmark is Vice President for Political and Security Affairs at The National Bureau of Asian Research. He can be reached at <adenmark@nbr.org>.

China is experiencing a transition that has been as rapid as it has been relentless. Since Deng Xiaoping inaugurated the policy of "reform and opening" in 1978, China's economy has skyrocketed from being one of the poorest to become the world's second largest. This explosion in wealth has lifted millions out of poverty and vastly improved the quality of life for a significant percentage of citizens in the world's most populous country.

Yet unprecedented economic growth has also generated unprecedented social dislocations and challenges. Rising prosperity has forced China to adjust to the demands of a modern economy, which has resulted in rapid urbanization, privatization, marketization, globalization, and informatization.[1] The scale and speed of this growth have generated the kind of corruption, environmental degradation, social dislocation, economic disparity, and political unrest that often accompany rapid change. Moreover, unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet—driven by long-standing religious, ethnic, and historical grievances—remains a persistent challenge.

Beijing has sought to address grievances with promises of continued economic growth and regular improvements in the standard of living for the Chinese people. To date, this strategy appears to have been largely successful. Annual per capita income has expanded to the point that in 2012 it surpassed $10,000 for people in six municipalities, provinces, and regions.[2] Yet unending growth is not, in itself, a recipe for stability. Indeed, the number of mass protests seems to rise irrespective of China's economic performance.[3] In 1993, Beijing reported 8,709 such incidents, which in 2005 jumped to 87,000. While China has stopped releasing official data, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences puts the number of incidents in 2006 at 90,000, and Chinese sociologist Sun Liping estimates that there were 180,000 incidents in 2010.[4] The disparity between economic growth and popular discontent brings to mind Alexis de Toqeuville's study of the pre-revolutionary French peasantry, which noted that "steadily increasing

[1] See Kenneth G. Lieberthal, *Managing the China Challenge: How to Achieve Corporate Success in the People's Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2011), 80.

[2] The areas with a per capita GDP above $10,000 in 2012 were Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai municipalities; Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces; and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. "6 Regions' Per Capita GDP above $10,000," SINA English, January 30, 2013, http://english.sina.com/china/2013/0129/555329.html.

[3] Minxin Pei, "Occupy Beijing," *Diplomat*, http://thediplomat.com/2011/12/30/occupy-beijing.

[4] Michael Forsythe, "China's Spending on Internal Police Force in 2010 Outstrips Defense Budget," Bloomberg, March 6, 2011, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-03-06/china-s-spending-on-internal-police-force-in-2010-outstrips-defense-budget.html.

prosperity" does not tranquilize citizens but rather promotes "a spirit of unrest."[5] In other words, a rising standard of living tends to generate rising expectations for effective, just, and responsive governance.

This is a challenge that Beijing is well aware of—as a Chinese official once told me, "no one knows the political implications of a rising middle class better than a Marxist." While a robust domestic security force has been a feature of the People's Republic of China since it was founded in 1949, the size and sophistication of this force grew by leaps and bounds under the leadership of Hu Jintao. Today, China officially spends more on domestic security forces than it does on its military: in 2012, the official budget for police, militia, and other domestic security forces stood at $111 billion, and the defense budget was $106 billion.[6]

For now, Beijing's objective does not appear to be to resolve these problems or eliminate the phenomenon of rampant mass incidents. Rather, Beijing appears to be content to manage these incidents and ensure that they do not metastasize into something that can threaten the stability and leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Managing these dislocations often falls to China's domestic security forces. Yet, as Jonathan Walton describes in this *NBR Analysis*, this is not policing as understood in the Western sense. One could call it "law and order with Chinese characteristics." He argues that domestic security forces in China are not driven by binding laws and procedures, independent investigators, and modern investigatory techniques. Instead, domestic security in China is fundamentally influenced by the regular involvement of the CCP and marked by enforcement that is highly inconsistent and ideological, while being hampered by outdated practices and technologies.

This report contributes to a growing body of outside analysis on the dynamics of China's domestic stability. With a better understanding of how China polices itself, one gets a bit closer to understanding the raucous, chaotic, and complex reality inhabited by the Chinese people and how Beijing tries to govern them.

---

[5] Alexis de Toqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), referenced in Gordon G. Chang, "China Unrest—Instability Grows as China's Citizens Yearn for Something the Communist Party Can't Provide," Fox News, June 17, 2011, http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/06/17/china-unrest-instability-is-grows-as-chinas-citizens-yearn-for-something.

[6] "China Domestic Security Spending Rises to $111 billion," Reuters, March 5, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/05/us-china-parliament-security-idUSTRE82403J20120305. It is important to note that the separation between domestic security forces and the military is not as clear as these budget figures may suggest. The People's Liberation Army performs an important domestic security function, while the militia and intelligence services play both internal and external roles.

Intensifying Contradictions: Chinese Policing Enters the 21st Century

Jonathan Walton

Jonathan Walton is a Project Manager at The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) and was a 2011–12 Next Generation Fellow. He can be reached at <jwalton@nbr.org>.

Note: This report was made possible through a 2011–12 Next Generation Leadership in Asian Affairs Fellowship at The National Bureau of Asian Research. It represents a continuation of work conducted both as a graduate student at the University of Washington and as a research associate at the Long Term Strategy Group. The author would like to thank Andrew Oros, Susan Trevaskes, and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on an earlier draft. The views expressed are those of the author.

Executive Summary

This report explores how ongoing developments in China have exacerbated the significant challenges facing the country's police and other domestic security forces.

Main Argument

As the world's most populous country continues its unprecedented transformation toward becoming a developed economy, Chinese policing institutions face numerous challenges in preserving social stability. This analysis focuses on three key factors that restrict the ability of China's police to effectively manage domestic discontent and social upheaval.

- First, Chinese policing organs have inherited ideological legacies and outdated practices from the Mao and Deng eras, including a highly political view of crime and unrest, which contributes to arbitrary and overly harsh methods of social control.
- Second, China's domestic security forces are subject to political and organizational limitations, including a strained Leninist monitoring system, the persistent involvement of party and military interests in police oversight, budgetary constraints, and significant principal-agent problems that undermine popular confidence and damage professionalism.
- Third, Chinese policing institutions are struggling to adapt to the new technologies and social structures of the information age, which create a degree of forced transparency and raise popular expectations regarding police behavior.

Policy Implications

- China will continue to find it impossible to avoid widespread social unrest, given the magnitude of the changes at work and the inability of the central government to address systemic problems in governance and accountability. The U.S. should expect the path of China's future development to be rocky, especially once the Chinese economy slows down.
- In the absence of systemic reforms or major political changes, the burden of shepherding Chinese society through this difficult period will largely fall on the police forces, which are currently struggling with their own transformation.
- Cooperation with the U.S. and other countries on domestic security could potentially reduce the level of violence and upheaval that China experiences in the coming years. However, the U.S. must be careful to ensure that its values and interests are maintained in such cooperation.

One of the most critical questions in global geopolitics today is a fundamentally domestic one: will China's incremental reforms continue to be successful in managing the ongoing social, economic, and political transformation initiated under Deng Xiaoping, or will more dramatic changes prove necessary? Observers of the international order frequently discuss the challenges posed and faced by China as a rising power, but China's challenges on the domestic front are no less significant. These include sustaining the country's economic development, restructuring state-owned enterprises, constructing a social safety net, renegotiating the relationship between labor and industry, limiting environmental devastation, managing the demands of a highly nationalistic population, and escaping the grip of corruption and organized crime. Many of these issues naturally confront any country on the road to becoming a developed nation, but the speed and scope of China's undertaking—as well as several features peculiar to its history and political system—indicate that the social upheaval that accompanies this "transitional period" (*zhuanxing shiqi*) will continue to be dramatic.

Although the Chinese government has so far weathered and adapted to the challenges of the reform era, high-level leaders have been either unable or unwilling to resolve the underlying systemic causes of many ongoing state-society tensions: the lack of elite accountability and effective channels of political participation and redress, the state's continued oversight of and intrusion into many basic institutions of society, and the demand for more equitable access to the benefits of China's astounding economic growth. All organs of the state are charged with managing these tensions, but dealing with the symptoms of reform's destabilizing social transformation is often left to underfunded and overburdened local governments—and, ultimately, to the police and other domestic security forces. Consequently, the success of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at surviving and even thriving in the post-Mao era is due in part to its ability to monitor and preserve social order through state organs such as the public security system (*gong'an xitong*), the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF), and a number of less commonly discussed institutions. The adaptability and relative effectiveness of Chinese policing is thus an important part of the story of China's authoritarian resilience and whether that resilience can be sustained.

Like other state institutions in China, domestic security forces have certainly felt the effects of the Maoist political legacy, including the tendency for leadership and responsibilities to be "un-clarified and under-institutionalized" and allowances for

extreme flexibility in the means by which Chinese society is controlled.[1] A broad range of noble and less noble practices have been justified under the mission of domestic security organs to preserve China's social stability, safeguard its economic development, and protect the authority of the current regime.[2] The adaptable and often arbitrary nature of China's policing institutions has contributed to the resilience of the CCP over the last several decades, allowing the hammer of domestic security forces to potentially be used against any problem that even vaguely resembles a nail. But the same flexibility and instrumentalism have also reduced the demand for deeper reforms that might build a more secure foundation for China's social and political future (i.e., the rule of law, accountable leadership, and good governance). Internal disagreements within the party leadership over the mission, tactics, and oversight of domestic security have also stymied efforts at reforming police along strict legal standards. Thus, security forces are still regularly called upon to conduct "non-police activities" (*fei jingwu huodong*) or perform acts they know to be of dubious legality.[3]

The lack of systemic reform in governance, accountability, and dispute resolution has also meant that Chinese policing institutions must bear an ever-increasing burden when it comes to preserving social stability, and there is no solution yet on the horizon. The central leadership under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao acknowledged that widespread social unrest is often caused by legitimate complaints from citizens. Yet despite this more progressive tone, no sustained effort was made to seriously reconfigure state-society relations. Central party leaders have publicly called for local officials to ensure that legitimate concerns are addressed, including encouraging them to address potential problems before they lead to "mass incidents" (*quntixing zhi'an shijian*). However, such reforms have been minimal, and proactive efforts by local officials have mostly taken place in the propaganda and information-control spheres, rather than targeting the root causes of popular discontent. Consequently, the number of mass

[1] Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty: Guerilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China," in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China,* ed. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 10, 14. Heilmann and Perry's edited volume laudably seeks to expand the discussion beyond "an unremitting interplay of repression and resistance" (p. 4), focusing on displays of governance rather than dominance. While this report attempts to add domestic security forces back into the picture, it treats them in the same vein: as adaptable institutions of social management and governance.

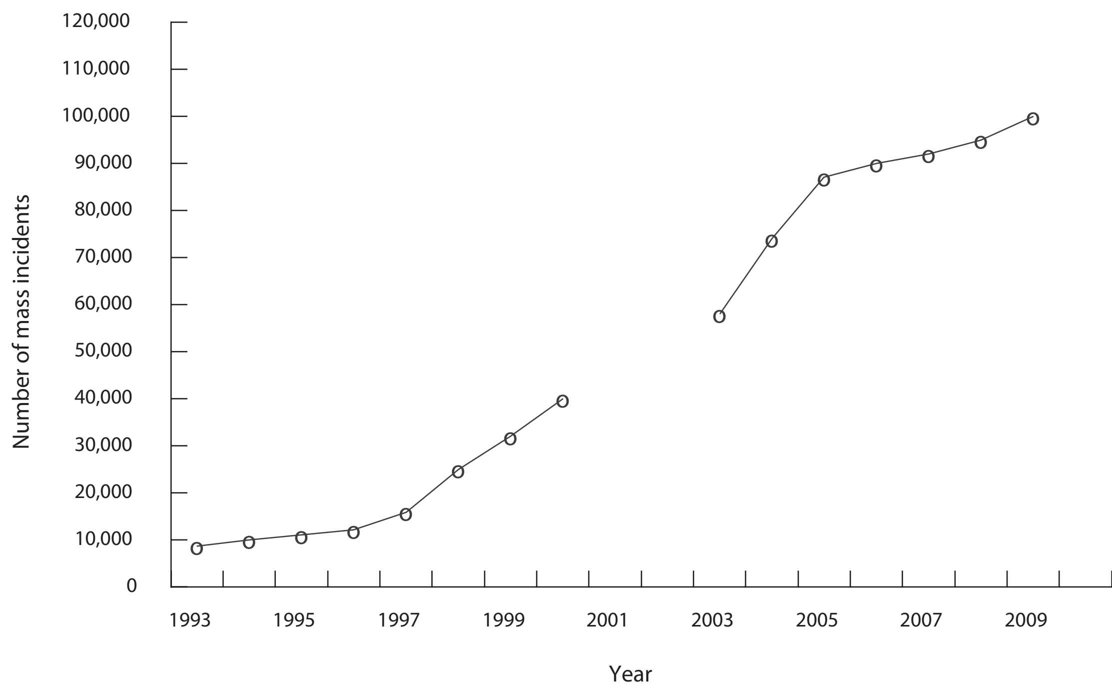
[2] While these may be among the "new historic missions" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), safeguarding China's political, economic, and developmental interests has long been a responsibility of domestic security institutions. Indeed, efforts to broaden the PLA's role demonstrate that the divide between police and military responsibilities remains ambiguous and contested. See James Mulvenon, "Chairman Hu and the PLA's 'New Historic Missions,'" *China Leadership Monitor* 27 (2009): 1–11.

[3] See, for example, Murray Scot Tanner and Eric Green, "Principals and Secret Agents: Central versus Local Control over Policing and Obstacles to 'Rule of Law' in China," *China Quarterly* 191 (2007): 644–70.

incidents continues to rise every year (see **Figure 1**), despite higher spending on the social-management institutions responsible for monitoring and controlling China's increasingly unruly society.

The thinking in U.S. policy and academic circles on Chinese policing is being pulled in two directions. On the one hand, Americans tend to be critical of China's domestic security institutions on both political and human rights grounds. Public

FIGURE 1 Mass Incidents in China, 1993–2009



SOURCE: For data on protest numbers, see Jae Ho Chung, "Assessing the Odds Against the Mandate of Heaven: Do the Numbers (on Instability) Really Matter?" in *Charting China's Future: Political, Social, and International Dimensions*, ed. Jae Ho Chung (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 112; and Xuezhi Guo, *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 246–7.

NOTE: The break in the line is due to the author's dissatisfaction with the quality of the estimates for 2001–2. Some experts think that China's central leaders have attempted to artificially lower (i.e., underreport) the number of protests since 2005, when the official figure of 87,000 generated a significant buzz in the international press. Reliable official data or government estimates on mass incidents since 2005 are difficult to obtain. Sun Liping of Tsinghua University estimates that China may have experienced 180,000 mass incidents in 2010, which would indicate that protests are growing exponentially rather than linearly. See "Protests in China: The Cauldron Boils," *Economist*, September 29, 2005; and "China's Spending on Internal Police Force in 2010 Outstrips Defense Budget," Bloomberg, March 5, 2011.

security personnel are charged with supporting an authoritarian regime that many in the United States would prefer to see substantially reformed or replaced with a more democratic system. In addition, when handling mass incidents or detaining suspected criminals, security officers often use harsh or overzealous methods that do not adhere to the rule of law or adequately protect the rights of individuals. On the other hand, nobody wants to see China fall victim to sustained and violent unrest, which would be catastrophic for both the region and the world. As a result, it is critical that Chinese police forces handle social disturbances and rising crime in a way that protects the Chinese people and their livelihood.[4] Additionally, as the U.S. and Chinese economies become increasingly intertwined, other issues have arisen. Social unrest in China—such as labor disputes halting work at Chinese factories—may eventually threaten U.S. economic interests in potent ways. American businesses may find themselves desiring stability and fearing disruptions, as well as being tempted by the promise of market access or lucrative contracts into cooperating with the demands of Chinese state entities, including police.[5]

In an effort to broaden and deepen U.S. policymakers' appreciation of the issues surrounding policing in China, this report examines the major challenges facing the country's domestic security forces in "preserving social stability" (*weihu shehui wending*) in the present era. It starts from the assumption that widespread social tension and outright conflict are largely unavoidable given the magnitude of the changes at work and the inability of the central government to address the systemic problems mentioned above. Consequently, the analysis focuses on three key challenges that restrict the ability of China's police to effectively manage such domestic discontent and social upheaval.

- First, Chinese policing organs have inherited ideological legacies and outdated practices from the Mao and Deng eras, including a highly political view of crime and unrest, which contributes to arbitrary and overly harsh methods of social control.

[4] Notably, Asia's other massive rising power, India, is vexed by the sustained Naxalite insurgency in its poorest regions. The insurgency consumes an immense amount of the country's resources and complicates efforts at both domestic security and economic development. See, for example, Pratul Ahuja and Rajat Ganguly, "The Fire Within: Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 2 (2007): 249–74. Many developing countries in Latin America, the Balkans and Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia have also experienced sustained internal rebellions.

[5] U.S. businesses have been called to testify before congressional committees on the information and technology that they have provided to the Chinese police. See, for example, Tom Zeller Jr., "House Member Criticizes Internet Companies for Practices in China," *New York Times*, February 15, 2006. Zeller describes discussions that likely contributed to Google shutting down its search engine for mainland China in 2010.

- Second, China's domestic security forces are subject to political and organizational limitations, including a strained Leninist monitoring system, the persistent involvement of party and military interests in police oversight, budgetary constraints, and significant principal-agent problems that undermine popular confidence and damage professionalism.
- Third, policing institutions are struggling to adapt to the new technologies and social structures of the information age. Despite China possessing perhaps the most extensive information-control scheme in the world, these developments create a degree of forced transparency and raise popular expectations regarding police behavior.

Before delving into these challenges, the first section offers a brief organizational outline of China's domestic security forces. The next section then provides an overview of the ideological background of Chinese policing and efforts to alter it to meet the new conditions of the reform era. The third section covers the organizational structure of the state's social-control system, including the ways in which the party and military remain closely linked to domestic security work, while section four examines new difficulties posed by the rise of information technology. The report concludes by offering suggestions on how China—possibly with U.S. or other international assistance—might avoid destabilizing levels of social upheaval over the next few decades.

The Organization of China's Domestic Security Forces

The Chinese policing system can seem rather opaque and unique, but it actually shares many similarities with national-level domestic security institutions in other authoritarian states. Additionally, while the Chinese government is often portrayed—not altogether unfairly—as being secretive and paranoid, a wide variety of contemporary and historical sources on Chinese police activities are openly available for researchers to examine, both in China and abroad. The most important domestic security institutions in China include the following:

- *Central Political and Legal Affairs Committee*. This committee is the highest decision-making body on domestic security in the CCP. It has an immense portfolio that includes all the other organizations mentioned in this list, although it does not typically act in the military realm. Each lower-level party organization also has a political and legal affairs committee (PLAC), generally led by one of the

highest-ranking party members at that level. Local committees are responsible for the oversight of local police, among other duties.

- *Ministry of Public Security*. The MPS oversees all of China's standard police and some paramilitary SWAT units. It shares oversight of the PAPF with the highest military decision-making body in China, the Central Military Commission (CMC). The MPS has a very broad set of responsibilities to maintain social order that extend far beyond what is normally handled by a local U.S. police department.

- *People's Armed Police Force*. The PAPF is China's main paramilitary force. It primarily manages domestic unrest but also performs counterterrorism, border control, and many other responsibilities. Under the dual oversight of the MPS and the CMC, the PAPF is organized and trained along military lines, but central leaders seem to want it under civilian control as much as possible.

- *Militia and reserve forces*. These forces are regularly called on to provide assistance to domestic security forces in preserving public order, as well as to support disaster relief operations.

- *Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps*. The XPCC is an ex-military and still partially paramilitary organization responsible for the management of large swaths of territory in China's northwest region, including the maintenance of security.

- *Ministry of State Security*. The MSS is the Chinese counterpart to the CIA. It is focused predominantly on foreign threats but is also active domestically, countering foreign espionage and monitoring dissidents and political activists.

- *Guard units*. Various guard units are responsible for providing security to Chinese party and military leaders as well as securing important facilities and locations. When necessary, they collaborate with both military and public security forces.

For the sake of streamlining the discussion, this report focuses primarily on the policing organs that fall under the MPS and the PAPF. Such forces constitute the majority of Chinese police personnel and are the ones primarily responsible for monitoring and controlling unrest.

Ideological Distortions

As the reform era began in the late 1970s, Chinese domestic security work remained strongly grounded in the state-building nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Communist Party leaders, police and military officers, and even a large portion of the public believed that internal unrest and external enemies continued to threaten the Chinese nation, as best exemplified by the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the United States' purported desire for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to democratize or collapse, despite the normalization of bilateral relations. Party leaders declared that the Chinese people were unable to address these issues on their own—the lawless mass politics of recent decades was used as a negative example of "democracy"—and the CCP was thus still needed to impose and preserve social order, transcending its own internal divisions and adhering to a unified party line in order to save the nation.

The solution to national weakness was more or less the same as in 1900: modernization, development, and state-strengthening. Individuals and groups who continued to foment crime and unrest, despite having been duly informed of the project of national salvation and modernization, were considered immoral and treasonous, being determined to sabotage China's welfare for their own parochial interests. Independent social groups—i.e., those organized outside of state oversight—were also branded a threat to the unity of the national project and targeted for co-optation or suppression. This foundation of crisis politics, national salvation, and the moralization of crime and unrest was largely carried over from the Mao era, although the language became less Marxist and more focused on safeguarding China's economic development.[6]

At the beginning of the reform era the police were "a political instrument of the state employed to suppress and oppress the enemy class" rather than a law enforcement body.[7] The institutional heritage of China's civilian police force lies partially in the

---

[6] For more on the nationalistic ideology behind Chinese domestic security policies, see Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity Under Reform* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Ben Xu, "Chinese Populist Nationalism: Its Intellectual Politics and Moral Dimensions," *Representations* 76 (2001): 123–24; Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Its International Orientations," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2000): 1–33; Michael Schoenhals, "Demonising Discourse in Mao Zedong's China: People vs. Non-People," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 3–4 (2007): 465–82; Rana Mitter, "Contention and Redemption: Ideologies of National Salvation in Republican China," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 3, no. 1 (2002): 44–74; and David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[7] Kam C. Wong, *Police Reform in China* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2012), 6.

underground secret-service networks and internal purges of the 1930s.[8] In addition, a significant portion of police and paramilitary officers were demobilized soldiers, who brought their highly politicized military backgrounds to policing.[9] Maoist ideology taught that criminals were not members of the people (*renmin*) but rather counterrevolutionary saboteurs of the project of national strengthening. Chinese policing organs frequently described themselves as the only thing standing between an unruly society and a national catastrophe. This view justified harsh practices and an emphasis on the broad preservation of social stability over a legalistic enforcement of the law, especially early in the reform era when there was not yet a strong legal code supporting police work.

This way of thinking, however, would be challenged by the return of petty crime and social unrest, especially because it came from the children of the urban classes. The initial stages of agricultural and economic reform in the late 1970s and early 1980s created a vast number of displaced and idle people, particularly youth. The state-directed life paths of the socialist system gradually gave way to a mixed economy in which individuals were significantly more mobile and expected to compete for their livelihood. The return of the "sent down" youth to the cities, the reorganization of the education system, and the steady flow of rural surplus labor into urban areas also contributed to the high unemployment rate among youth in the cities.[10] As should be expected when a large number of idle youth congregate, some of them joined together in informal gangs and participated in a variety of deviant activities.[11] But Chinese officials and police were unprepared for the return of petty crime and hooliganism, which previously had been diminished and obscured by the socialist system. As the economic reforms took hold, increasing both the quality of life and the disparity between different sectors of society, other kinds of crime began to re-emerge as well. Given the popular association of crime with lawlessness and poor governance, it was thought that if such crime were to continue, it "might

---

[8] See, for example, Michael Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics: A History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), chap. 1–2; and Patricia Stranahan, *Underground: The Shanghai Communist Party and the Politics of Survival, 1927–1937* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

[9] Yitzhak Shichor, "Demobilization: The Dialectics of PLA Troop Reduction," *China Quarterly* 146 (1996): 354; and Harold M. Tanner, *Strike Hard! Anti-Crime Campaigns and Chinese Criminal Justice, 1979–1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1999), 34.

[10] Børge Bakken, "Crime, Juvenile Delinquency, and Deterrence Policy in China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 30 (1993): 44–45.

[11] Harold M. Tanner, "The Offense of Hooliganism and the Moral Dimension of China's Pursuit of Modernity, 1979–1996," *Twentieth-Century China* 26, no. 1 (2000): 17.

cast doubts on the ability of the political leaders and the credibility of the Chinese Communist Party to lead the country."[12]

To deal with the problem of crime during reform, Chinese leaders attempted to modernize China's policing and criminal justice institutions. These efforts were based partially on the recommendations of more progressive schools of thought that argued for the rule of law, as well as on more scientific police work based on international standards. However, the majority of police were not immediately enthusiastic about the new approach:

> Public security men and officers were used to working under the guidance of policy rather than within the narrower and less flexible framework of the Criminal Law [1979] and Criminal Procedure Law [1980]. They were trained in and accustomed to class struggle rather than struggle against common crime, and they had a reputation for avoiding the hard work of detection and investigation, preferring instead to extract testimony by means of threats, marathon interrogations, beatings and torture.[13]

While crime was now to be viewed as "a contradiction among the people" (*renmin neibu maodun*) rather than "a contradiction between the people and the enemy" (*diwo maodun*), old habits would not go away so easily. Harold M. Tanner suggests that the effort to reform Chinese policing in the 1980s represented "a concentrated effort to institutionalize, to regularize, and to professionalize the administration of the coercive power of the state through the criminal justice system." Yet he also argues that it "was not and should not be understood as a movement towards judicial independence or the autonomy of law." Tanner concludes that attempts at police reform "have had no effect on the theoretical assumption of legal instrumentalism and upon the continued role of the criminal justice system as a tool or weapon in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party," since the party and military are still "above the law and the law remains an instrument of attempted social management and social engineering in the hands of the Party."[14] Likewise, criminologist and retired Hong Kong police inspector Kam Wong observes that far from legalistically enforcing an impartial set of laws, "the overriding mission of public security in the post-Deng era is to maintain a stable social environment in which economic reform can develop and prosper."[15]

[12] Wong, *Police Reform in China*, 7.

[13] Tanner, *Strike Hard!* 35.

[14] Ibid., 66, 193–94.

[15] Wong, *Police Reform in China*, 7.

This viewpoint endures to this day, despite more recent efforts at improving the legal basis of law enforcement. Maintaining a long tradition of xenophobia, Chinese police officials continue to suggest that many social tensions are caused not by deficiencies in governance or legitimate cases of injustice but by conspiracies against China concocted by its enemies, especially Western powers such as the United States. Kam Wong describes the persistent belief that "foreign countries are actively destabilizing the Chinese political economy and corrupting the minds of Chinese youth in order to advance their economic interests (open market), political agenda (liberal ideology), and cultural dominance (corrupt lifestyle)."[16] The director of the Sichuan Provincial Public Security Department recently wrote an article that is worth quoting at length to demonstrate how persistent and detailed these arguments are today, even among high-level police officials:

> Hostile foreign and domestic forces manipulate, incite speculation about, and directly provoke contradictions within our people in increasingly prominent ways. Their methods fall into three main categories:
>
> - *Taking advantage of our instabilities to stir up trouble.* The economic transition and social transformation that have accompanied our country's reform and development have brought about a profound adjustment of the pattern of interests and, objectively speaking, have provided the conditions for hostile elements to meddle. They seize on some controversial and sensitive domestic issue, "rights protection" incident, or judicial case and openly meddle, wantonly speculate, and attempt to instigate the ignorant against the party and the state, damaging our excellent situation of prosperity and stability. This approach is quite insidious and concealed, and public security organs must be highly vigilant.
> - *Meddling in our mass incidents to intensify contradictions.* This specific stage of our country's economic and social development exhibits a wide range of social contradictions and major disputes; if these are improperly handled, they can easily lead to mass incidents. Hostile forces do everything in their power to meddle in our country's internal mass incidents in a vain attempt to exacerbate the situation, scale, destruction, and impact; the incidents in Guizhou's Weng'an County and Yunnan's Menglian County are typical examples. This approach is bound to aggravate the antagonism of these contradictions and the seriousness of the resulting consequences. Public security organs must guard against this.
> - *Seeking every opportunity to directly create chaos.* An increasingly powerful China creates great uneasiness for the hostile forces both inside and outside its borders. They directly rouse their domestic forces into action and take advantage of the portion of the masses that do not know the truth; increasingly common incidents of vandalism, arson, and other destructive activities—such as the

[16] Wong, *Police Reform in China*, 3.

> March 14 incident in Lhasa, the March 16 incident in Aba, the July 5 incident in Xinjiang, and others—are certainly an example of Western anti-China forces and hostile foreign and domestic forces adopting the model of external forces commanding internal actions, directly manufacturing domestic chaos on a large scale. The motivations behind this approach are more sinister, the manner is more violent, and the harm is more profound, so public security organs must decisively handle this.[17]

These kinds of accounts, which blame crime and unrest on foreign agitators, prevent the government from addressing the systemic economic and governance issues that cause most social disturbances and divert public attention from this reality. Because the police—beholden to local governments for funding and authorization—do not have the power to resolve local problems by themselves, they can often do little more than blame conveniently nebulous "people with ulterior motives" (*bieyouyongxin de ren*) for any crises and protests. Unfortunately, this view casts disgruntled Chinese citizens as knowingly or unknowingly committing treason by doing the bidding of foreign and domestic enemies of China, something that locals on the ground know to be untrue.

Repeatedly blaming social unrest on nefarious foreign figures appears to be somewhat convincing to mainstream Chinese populations when it comes to the country's western regions, where the "Dalai clique" and "Uighur separatists" provide convenient targets. But this strategy is much less effective when the problems involve local disputes in the Han heartland. The central leadership has tried to demonize emerging crime and unrest as being the work of misanthropes pursuing their own selfish ends to the detriment of the community and nation. However, public sentiment is beginning to turn. A growing number of Chinese citizens feel that the above description applies equally to many local and even high-level officials, some of whom are deeply involved with organized crime and other forms of corruption. Revelations about formerly lauded party leaders such as Chen Xitong, Chen Liangyu, and Bo Xilai have fed the public's jaded belief that nearly all CCP members are corrupt and

[17] Zeng Shengquan, "Xin shiqi gong'an jiguan tisheng weihu guojia anquan he shehui wending nengli tanjiu" [Inquiry into the Ability of Public Security Organs to Enhance the Safeguarding of National Security and Social Stability in the New Era], *Gong'an Yanjiu* 196 (2011): 12. A 2008 incident in Weng'an, Guizhou Province, involved the unnatural death of a young woman. The death was officially declared a suicide but raised enough questions that it resulted in an extended standoff over the woman's burial and a riot against the local public security office. A clash between police and rubber farmers occurred later that same year in Menglian, Yunnan Province, resulting in the deaths of multiple farmers. It is unlikely that external meddling was a significant factor in either incident. The passage mentioning Lhasa, Aba, and Xinjiang refers to several ethnically charged incidents occurring in China's western regions.

undermined the narrative that purported foreign agents, traitors, and troublemakers are behind crime and social unrest.

It also seems clear that overly harsh suppression of past protests—which derives in part from an ideology that values development and stability above all else—sows the seeds for future problems, as ill feelings grow between citizens and local government. After a major incident erupted in Guizhou's Weng'an County in 2008, the provincial party secretary argued that the outpouring of local passions was exacerbated by the mismanagement of previous incidents:

> In the development of local mineral resources, resettlement, building demolition and other such work, situations frequently occurred that infringed upon the interests of the masses. In the process of disposing of these contradictions, disputes, and mass incidents, some cadres used a brash style, simple methods, and were cavalier about calling on police suppression. In this regard, the Weng'an party secretary, county government, county public security bureau, and the leading cadres of the relevant departments cannot avoid responsibility [for the incident].[18]

Unfortunately, local officials can in fact avoid responsibility for quite a significant period of time, and in some cases indefinitely, due to the political and organizational limitations of China's domestic security system.

Political and Organizational Limitations

Encompassing several institutions with a long and established history, China's domestic security forces face significant challenges in attempting to adapt their organizational structures and leadership systems to the needs of the present.

Interconnectedness with Other Social-Management Organs

Acquiring a relatively complete picture of Chinese domestic security forces can be difficult because a wide range of institutions are involved in preserving China's social stability, and they often are not grouped together neatly on organizational charts. China's policing institutions should be considered part of the much larger social-management (*shehui guanli*) apparatus that includes nearly every organ of the Chinese state, all of which are to some extent involved in monitoring and guiding

[18] "Guizhou Weng'an xian weishuji he xianzhang bei mianzhi" [Weng'an Party Secretary and County Head Are Removed from Office], Xinhua, July 4, 2008.

Chinese society at the macro and micro levels. This broader Leninist understanding of social work also includes, in addition to the police, local mass organizations such as neighborhood and village committees, the housing registration system (*hukou*), the work-unit system (*danwei*) for employees of state enterprises, party-run labor unions, the judicial and mediation systems, the "letters and visits" (*xinfang* or *shangfang*) petitioning system, the propaganda system for monitoring media content, the state supervision of educational and religious institutions, and many other government efforts to shape Chinese social life.

Nearly all of these institutions—by being tied into the larger party-state bureaucracy—have the potential to cooperate with policing organs. Conversely, Chinese police officers are frequently called on to assist with implementing nearly all the administrative systems listed above. This broader interconnectedness with the rest of the state bureaucracy encourages the instrumental use of police in inappropriate situations, as different organs of the state are expected to work together to preserve stability. Furthermore, party officials often have oversight or administrative authority over a number of different state institutions and may issue orders or guidance to one institution in order to further the work of another in their portfolio. Consequently, public security officials and others involved in domestic security tend to think about policing in broad terms that include media controls and administrative measures as well as traditional police actions.

The Role of the Communist Party in Police Work

Since at least the mid-1930s, years before the CCP came to power, the Chinese leadership has intentionally avoided the Soviet NKVD/KGB model of a politically independent and extremely powerful police force. This is partly due to the negative experiences of early Communist purges, when inquisitorial "rectification" campaigns did serious damage to the organizational strength and morale of the CCP and the Red Army by indiscriminately purging—and often executing—members for largely conjectural misdeeds or secret loyalties. Additionally, Mao and other high-level leaders did not want the PRC's policing institutions to become a breeding pit for political rivals who might abuse their authority for personal gain. Consequently, both the CCP and the military are today politically insulated and do not fall under the jurisdiction of China's domestic security forces but instead are accountable to their own "discipline inspection" bureaucracies. In practice, party members and military personnel can only be investigated and potentially charged with crimes by the police and judicial systems if higher-level leaders give the order, as occurred in the cases of former party leaders Chen Xitong, Chen Liangyu, and Bo Xilai. Essentially, these officials cannot be arrested

but must be purged or punished, with the police and courts merely handling the fallout from fundamentally political—not legal or law enforcement—decisions.

At the highest level, the responsibility for China's domestic security system ultimately falls on the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee. Until November 2012, one low-ranking member of the committee was given primary responsibility for overseeing the country's security and judicial systems by being appointed head of the Central PLAC.[19] This has changed in the wake of the 18th Party Congress, due to the reduction in the number of standing committee members and the purported desire for domestic security concerns to no longer block legal reform. Consequently, China's police czar is no longer a standing committee member, although the holder of that position remains a member of the larger Politburo. Still, both the current and previous heads of the Central PLAC—Meng Jianzhu and his predecessor Zhou Yongkang—were formerly heads of the MPS, so that line of succession has been preserved in some fashion.[20]

At the lower levels, the CCP ensures that domestic security institutions remain loyal to and dependent on it by making them subject to the party leadership on the same level, for both authorization and funding. Consequently, city police are financed by and take orders from city-level party leaders, county police fall under county-level party committees, and so forth, all the way up to the level of the national ministries. Of course, lower-level policing units also receive orders from their higher-level counterparts—for example, all public security organs are ultimately governed by the MPS bureaucracy. While accountability to both local- and higher-level leaders is common to many institutions within the PRC, since it reduces the need for direct

---

[19] The Central PLAC was established in 1980, at the beginning of the reform era, and was originally headed by Peng Zhen.

[20] The head of the Central PLAC also oversees two small bureaucracies created through special orders from the Politburo: the Central Leading Group on Dealing with Evil Cults (also known as the "6-10 office," originally established to suppress Falun Gong) and the Central Leading Group for Maintaining Stability, both of which have offices down to the local party level. In practice, these two organizations are essentially the same, sharing most personnel, and theoretically enjoy a source of authority independent from traditional policing structures due to their direct authorization from the highest levels of the CCP. Additionally, the Domestic Security Department (DSD) is a special force within the MPS that deals with what the state considers to be subversive political activities. According to leaked documents, the DSD liaises regularly with the domestic security organs that operate under special authorization from central party leaders and is thus likely to have a more direct line to higher-level authorities than standard police. See, for example, Yang Guangwei, "Zou qunzhong luxian, shi guowei genji" [Follow the Path of Staying Close to the Masses, Strengthen the Foundation of the Domestic Security Department], translated in "Internal Document of the Domestic Security Department of the Public Security Bureau (Part I)," *China Digital Times*, January 26, 2010, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/01/internal-document-of-the-domestic-security-department-of-the-public-security-bureau-part-i.

oversight by central leaders, this arrangement also creates significant difficulties for any attempt at improving consistency or reforming policing practices.

The vicious cycle that local governments and police forces often fall into might be described as comprising the following stages (see **Figure 2** for a more complex illustration of this cycle):

1. The central government makes extensive demands on local governments but provides insufficient funding to meet these demands. To add insult to injury, it then grades local officials on their ability to achieve certain benchmarks related to economic development and social stability.

2. Consequently, local government officials are strongly incentivized to use corrupt and illegitimate means to secure the funds needed to support critical state institutions (such as the police), achieve the benchmarks set by the central government, and enrich themselves.

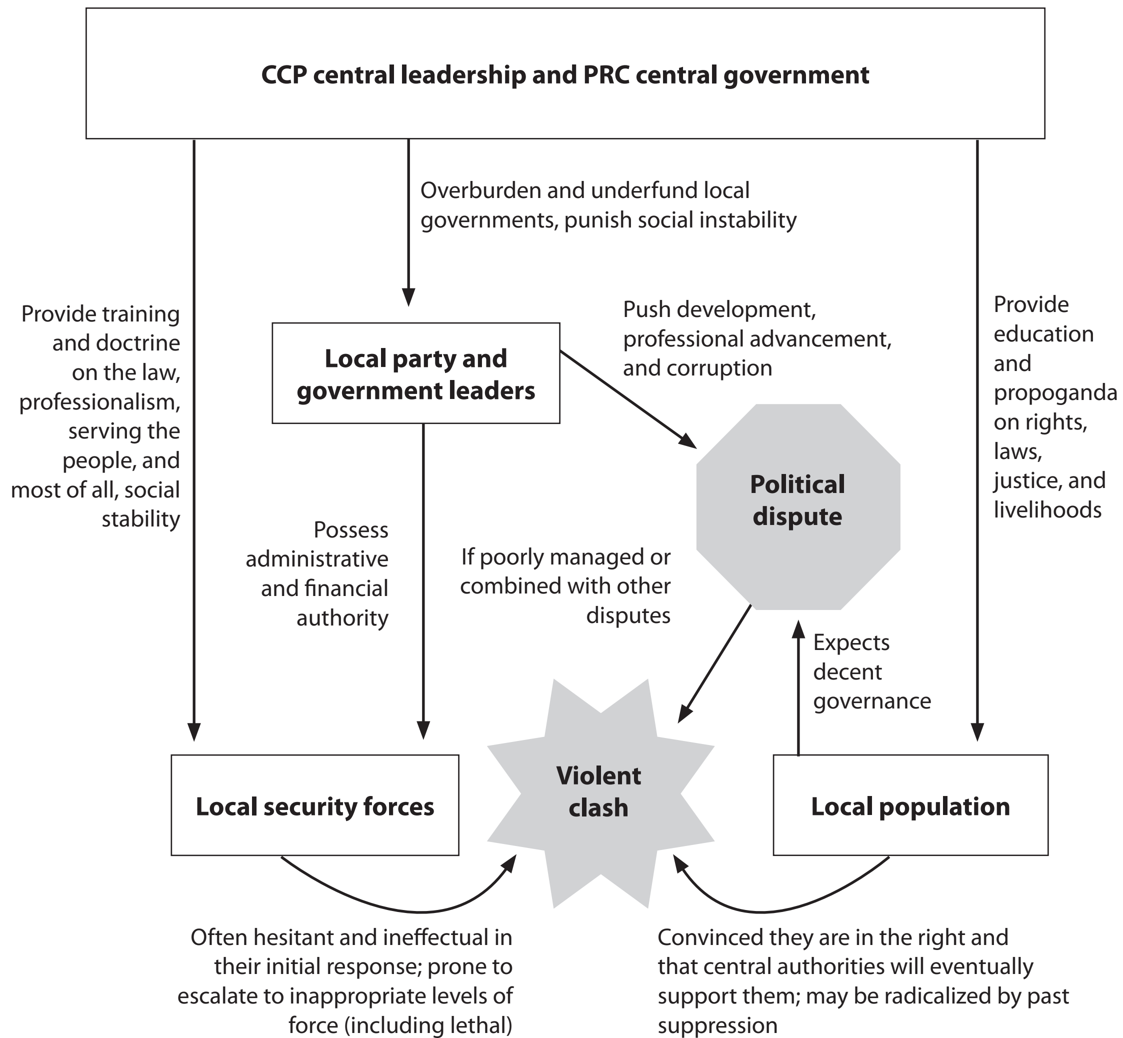
3. Meanwhile, the local population is encouraged by education and propaganda from the center to have relatively high expectations regarding government and police performance, and to know when their rights and livelihood are being unjustly affected. Additionally, they may already be upset about past or ongoing disputes when a new problem arises.

4. However, because local police are beholden to the local government for their own funding and authorization, they are strongly incentivized to collaborate with or at least protect officials pursuing illegitimate fundraising means. The police are thus unlikely to investigate corrupt practices or side with the general populace in disputes.

Thus, dubious security practices, including the improper use of police and the contracting of untrained locals as unauthorized security personnel, allow local officials to maintain their dominant social position and fallaciously improve their performance vis-à-vis the benchmarks set by higher-level state organs. While scholars and administrators have long been critical of interference from local party and government leaders who use their leverage over police to coerce them into illicit acts, little has changed in the last decade under Hu Jintao.

Wanting to try its hand at a more compassionate authoritarianism, the Hu-Wen administration encouraged local officials to anticipate problems and prevent crises before they erupted into large-scale protests. However, as Yongshun Cai argues, from the point of view of local officials dealing with unrest, "the most serious risk is

FIGURE 2 Center-Local Relations and Outbreaks of Unrest



intervention from higher-level authorities, including the central authorities, because this is often a sign of the local government's failure to maintain social stability, or their abuse of power."[21] Since higher-level intervention will almost certainly bring serious negative consequences, most local authorities will try to preempt such a possibility by

[21] Yongshun Cai, "Local Governments and the Suppression of Popular Resistance in China," *China Quarterly* 193 (2008): 27.

first intervening themselves. Sometimes these officials will make small concessions, but more frequently they attempt to suppress protesters without involving higher levels of government. Cai's examination of a cross-section of local unrest cases "reveals local governments' perception of the high cost of making concessions and the limited risk from repression."[22] Concessions may require financial resources, policy changes, or even the punishment or removal of local officials. On the other hand, the use of force in suppressing protesters is often legally supported by anti-protest laws and only incurs the wrath of the central government if it is mismanaged and results in large numbers of deaths or increased levels of unrest.

Over the last decade or more, the central government has attempted to more tightly restrict the ability of local governments to arbitrarily call on security forces whenever they like. Spurred on by preparations for the 2008 Olympics and the 60th anniversary of the PRC, as well as by the 2008 unrest in Tibet, the central government released the Regulations on the Handling of Mass Incidents by Public Security Organs in 2008 and the People's Armed Police Law in 2009. Both these documents attempt to provide specific guidelines for using additional police to suppress a mass incident. The latter represents the first time that paramilitary activities have been publicly regulated in this way, although it was purportedly based on existing internal regulations.[23] It remains to be seen, however, whether such measures will make any dent in the widespread misuse of police by local governments.

An Outdated Monitoring-and-Control System

As China's civilian police force, the MPS governs a national public security system that seeks to monitor and shape Chinese society to a much greater extent than most Western police systems and must attempt to do so with fewer police officers per capita. There are only twelve police officers for every ten thousand Chinese citizens, which Kam Wong notes is "about a quarter to a third of the rate for the West."[24] During the first three decades of CCP rule, China's relatively small police force was assisted by an immense monitoring-and-control network that the state organized in all sectors

[22] Cai, "Local Governments and Suppression," 35.

[23] Ministry of Public Security, *Gong'an jiguan chuzhi quntixing shijian guiding* [Regulations on the Handling of Mass Incidents by Public Security Organs], 2008; State Council of the People's Republic of China, *Renmin Wuzhuang Jingcha fa* [People's Armed Police Law], 2009; and "'Wuzhuang Jingcha Fa' banbu zhi ri zhuangfang Wujing Budui Silingyuan Wu Shuangzhan" [An Interview with PAP Commander Wu Shuangzhan on the Promulgation Day of the "People's Armed Police Law"], Xinhua, August 28, 2009, http://www.china.com.cn/military/txt/2009-08/28/content_18419479.htm.

[24] Wong, *Police Reform in China*, 31.

of society. This network included the strict household registration system—which still exists in modified form—and "mass line" organizations such as neighborhood committees. The latter were frequently staffed by older members of the community and assisted the police by monitoring local happenings and reporting suspicious activities. Even in the mid-1980s, according to an MPS official, "of all the cases solved by public security organs in our country, approximately 60 percent are owing to the assistance of the masses."[25] Unlike volunteer neighborhood watch groups in the United States, these committees were not merely informal associations but "quite formal institutions of social control…integrated into the operation of the formal agencies."[26]

However, with China's reform and opening, it became impossible for this system of volunteer surveillance to continue at the same level of effectiveness. During the next three decades, and continuing in the present, the triumvirate of household registration, neighborhood policing, and work units was no longer able to control and monitor the increasingly mobile and independent population, putting the police in a much more difficult position because their duties remained essentially the same.[27] In the contemporary era, popular committees have fallen into neglect or been rendered inadequate due to both mass urbanization and the onset of a modern lifestyle in which people no longer know their neighbors. Additionally, in cases involving organized crime or official corruption, even neighborhood committees fear retaliation or suppression, especially if local police are involved. Overall, police have had to deal with an increasingly mobile and urban population that is more difficult to monitor and control.

Due to the limited size of China's public security force relative to the population and the fact that party leaders will often refuse to authorize funding for additional full-time police, local public security bureaus have hired temporary or irregular police to supplement the professional force. Without proper training or the prospect of advancing through the MPS bureaucracy, these semi-police are reportedly prone to violence, abuse, and disregard for established procedures—problems that are discussed relatively openly in major policing journals. At the municipal level, city governments hire former security personnel or local thugs as *chengguan* (municipal officers), who are charged

---

[25] Gao Xu, "Combating Criminal Offenders by Relying on the Masses in the People's Republic of China," *Police Studies: The International Review of Police Development* 3 (1983–84): 4.

[26] Xiaoming Chen, "Community and Policing Strategies: A Chinese Approach to Crime Control," *Policing and Society* 12, no. 1 (2002): 3. For more on neighborhood committees and their persistent role in social management and monitoring at the local level, see Benjamin L. Read, *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[27] Michael Dutton, "Translation: 'The Basic Character of Crime in Contemporary China,'" *China Quarterly* 149 (1997): 160–61.

with enforcing non-criminal ordinances and combating minor crime, although they are best known for harassing street vendors, beggars, migrants, and other members of the urban underclass. Additionally, the number of private security organizations also appears to be increasing, often without a clear line between the illicit and licit ones. As such irregular security work by both independent contractors and "temporary" hired police has increased in all areas, maintaining minimum standards for quality and professionalism among the police forces has become even more difficult.[28]

While not unnoticed by authorities, these practices have actually expanded as the legitimate activities of security personnel have been further restricted by new institutional rules seeking to legalize and professionalize police work. Arguably, attempts by the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao administrations to promote the "legalization" and "professionalization" of Chinese policing have contributed to a further bifurcation of the PRC's internal security apparatus into official and unofficial sectors, or at least blurred the boundary between them. Frequently, proposed police reforms contradict other central mandates to preserve order by whatever means available. Local authorities are punished for tolerating or mishandling public unrest and for allowing petitioners within their jurisdictions to bring their cases to Beijing. Consequently, while official security personnel attempt to shroud their activities in legal discourse and improve unit discipline, unprofessional responsibilities previously undertaken by police (e.g., dissuading potential troublemakers, detaining petitioners, and suppressing minor disturbances) are now often performed by local, *ad hoc* contractors who are little more than thugs and gangsters. Some, in fact, are actually gangsters, further contributing to the interpenetration of Chinese police and organized crime.

Arbitrary detention and the abusive behavior of irregular police received extensive attention on Chinese-language portions of the Internet and in foreign news sources after the death of Sun Zhigang in 2003, which brought an official end to the notorious "custody and repatriation" system (*shourong qiansong*), and the death of Wei Wenhua in 2008, which highlighted abuses by chengguan. Abolishing custody and repatriation removed a set of methods relied on by the local state government and its security allies for competing with other social forces and performing the duties required by the central government—namely, preventing large numbers of petitioners from taking their cases to higher authorities. Custody and repatriation was originally established as a method for detaining vagabonds and migrants, but it quickly became a gray-market system of illegal detention for petitioners and other troublemakers after the central government demanded measurable reductions in

[28] See Taisheng Guo, "Private Security in China: A Note on Recent Developments," *Security Journal* 12 (1999); and Susan Trevaskes, "The Private/Public Security Nexus in China," *Social Justice* 34, no. 3–4 (2007–8).

petitioning. Subsequently, the celebrated central decision to abolish custody and repatriation—a decision not universally lauded in security circles or local government offices, as it left fewer alternatives for arbitrary detention—was mitigated at the local level by the establishment of "black jails" (*hei jianyu*), in which petitioners are detained and prevented from appealing to higher-level authorities.

Unofficial security contractors operate these detention facilities, which range from a makeshift cell in an abandoned basement to a wing operated within a hospital or psychiatric ward. They then forcibly transfer petitioners and other dissenters from Beijing and other major cities—where the petitioners have been trying to contact higher-level officials—back into the custody or supervision of local officials in their home regions. From the evidence available at present, it is not entirely clear how such practices developed or if such detentions are always premeditated by local officials who seek to protect their images vis-à-vis the central government. In many cases, it appears that independent gangs, having appointed themselves as security workers, may abduct petitioners and then ransom them to local authorities. Whatever the origin of this relationship, the transactions that take place between such gangs and local state governments provide the abductors with a quasi-official status that they leverage to justify their activities, gain the cooperation of local public security officers, and prevent intervention by higher-level authorities.[29]

The Role of the Military and Paramilitary in Police Work

Western imaginations shaped by shocking images from 1989 frequently expect the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to play a central role in suppressing unrest and preserving domestic stability in contemporary China. In reality, the role of the Chinese military in public security has been curtailed by both civilian and military leaders. The Chinese armed forces—especially the army—hold the ultimate trump card in any civil disorder that threatens the continued rule of the CCP: their willingness or refusal to engage protestors and rioters with military force.[30] However, the PLA would prefer to never again be forced to choose between the people and the party. It views either choice as disastrous for Chinese society and the military itself, potentially leading to

---

[29] For more information on recent petitioner-detention practices, see *An Alleyway in Hell: China's Abusive "Black Jails"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009).

[30] The Arab Spring has provided a number of examples where militaries have either refused to protect civilian governments (as in Tunisia and Egypt) or agreed to intervene militarily when police and paramilitary forces could not restore order (Libya, Bahrain, and Syria). China's own military intervention in June 1989 was sparked by the failure of civilian security forces—and even some military forces—to reach and clear Tiananmen Square.

internal division and another civil war on the mainland.[31] The Chinese armed forces also do not want their focus and mission diluted with nonmilitary activities that offer few opportunities for technological improvement, advanced training, or professional and political advancement.

By staying out of political and social work, such as suppressing dissent, the PLA can remain much more popular and respected among the citizenry than China's domestic security organs. On the party side, central leaders have recognized that while power may grow out of the barrel of a gun, economic development and social stability do not. Avoiding the ghosts of Tiananmen Square and promoting a vision of the PRC as a modern, developed country—rather than an oppressive state on par with the military juntas of the developing world—puts China on track to the kind of future and global status its leaders want. Consequently, China's political and military establishments generally agree that the country is in a much better position if civilian police and paramilitary forces can manage crime and social unrest and allow the PLA to focus on the foreign threats that only the military is equipped to handle. However, the past failures of domestic security organs and tendencies toward instrumentalism even in regard to the military ensure that the PLA is not yet fully free of such responsibilities.

The PAPF is the main paramilitary institution involved in domestic security, although it was absorbed by the PLA during the Cultural Revolution and had to be re-established at the beginning of the reform era. Additionally, the PAPF in its contemporary form can only be said to have truly come into being after the 1989 Tiananmen protests. Its failure to effectively suppress demonstrations and the eventual clearing of the square by PLA units from outside Beijing demonstrated that the PAPF was incapable of carrying out the duties for which it was specifically created—i.e., combating domestic enemies and unrest beyond the capabilities of standard police and allowing the PLA to remove itself from policing responsibilities. Subsequent reforms recast the PAPF along more military lines and helped create the current situation in

[31] For a discussion of the PLA's post-Tiananmen reflection on its domestic security role, see Roy Kamphausen, "China's Land Forces: New Priorities and Capabilities," in *Strategic Asia 2012–13: China's Military Challenge,* ed. Ashley Tellis and Travis Tanner (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012), 31–32; and Murray Scot Tanner, "The Institutional Lessons of Disaster: Reorganizing the People's Armed Police After Tiananmen," in *The People's Liberation Army as Organization—Reference Vol. 1.0*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002).

which the PLA retains an active role in managing these paramilitary units.[32] Currently, local PAPF units theoretically respond to the orders of public security organs above the county level. Thus, a prefecture or large city could call for paramilitary involvement in handling an incident, but lower-level administrative units—such as the governments and public security officers of townships and counties—could not. However, due to shared leadership with the PLA and the importance of informal ties, the relationships between local party officials and local PLA and PAPF officers play a large role in determining if and how the PAPF responds. Additionally, while the leadership ranks of the PAPF are often full of former military personnel rather than officers with a public security background, funding for local PAPF units is still largely dependent on local governments, limiting military control.[33]

Concerns remain over the ability of the PAPF to respond effectively in crisis situations. During the 2008 unrest in Tibet, the initially mismanaged reactions of local public security and PAPF units eventually led to other PAPF, militia, and possibly even PLA units from outside the area being brought in to support suppression of the quickly spreading riots.[34] In Tibet, as well as in Xinjiang a year later and in many previous cases, armed police units resorted to using live ammunition, despite post-Tiananmen efforts to develop nonlethal methods of crowd control. Overall, there are serious uncertainties surrounding future military and paramilitary intervention in major incidents of social

---

[32] Also organized roughly under the PAPF banner are the special police units (*tejing*), which are the equivalent of SWAT or fast-action response teams. Until recently, standard Chinese police officers were rarely allowed to carry guns. As a result, the tejing occupied a place somewhere between normal police and the PAPF and were called on to handle situations that might potentially involve violent criminals or other dangerous or emergency circumstances. Recently, some public security organs in major cities have created their own tejing units under MPS oversight. The PAPF also includes the so-called guard units who traditionally handle situations involving border security, customs, armored cars, coast guard duties, and the like, though their role seems to be evolving.

[33] Tanner, "The Institutional Lessons of Disaster," 612, 622. For more information on the PAP, see Tai Ming Cheung, "Guarding China's Domestic Front Line: The People's Armed Police and China's Stability," *China Quarterly* 146 (1996): 525–47; Shaoguang Wang, "China's Expenditure for the People's Armed Police and Militia," in *Chinese Civil-Military Relations: The Transformation of the People's Liberation Army*, ed. Nan Li (London: Routledge, 2006); Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing, January 2009), chap. VIII; and Yuning Wu, Ivan Y. Sun, and Aaron Fichtelberg, "Formalizing China's Armed Police: The 2009 PAP Law," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 56, no. 3 (2011).

[34] See, for example, Jim Yardley, "As Tibet Erupted, Security Forces Wavered," *New York Times*, March 24, 2008. There does not seem to be a consensus on whether PLA forces actually took part in suppressing protesters in Tibet or simply provided support for civilian and paramilitary security forces. Certain news sources reported armed "soldiers" being involved, but these seem to have been PAPF. See Murray Scot Tanner, "How China Manages Internal Security Challenges and Its Impact on PLA Missions," in *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other Than Taiwan*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 39–98.

unrest. It is still the case, as Edwin Winckler memorably argued, that "the [PAPF] is unlikely to be able to quell serious insurrection, and PLA units are unlikely to respond uniformly to civil orders to intervene."[35]

In the meantime, the PLA continues to play a secondary and supporting role in domestic policing across a variety of areas. First, a sizable number of Chinese domestic security personnel (especially within the PAPF) are former soldiers who bring their military background to police work. Some were transferred to civilian security forces *en masse* due to downsizing in the army, while others simply found a line of work consistent with their background or drew on the job-placement assistance from state organs charged with ensuring that large numbers of former military personnel do not end up unemployed, desperate, or angry with the party (an embarrassing and potentially explosive situation).[36] Second, as previously mentioned, the military shares leadership and administration of the PAPF and is solely responsible for the militia and reserve systems, which are regularly called on to perform "stability preservation" (*weiwen*) activities such as suppressing protests and unrest, particularly at the local level. Militia and reserve units also may be assigned to temporarily fill in for PAPF units that have been sent to help suppress unrest in neighboring regions.[37]

Third, the military plays a more active role in policing Tibet and Xinjiang, China's westernmost regions. These regions host a large number of paramilitary border guards (organized under the PAPF), and the tactics that public security officers employ against Uighur and Tibetan citizens are noticeably more paramilitary in character, since Chinese leaders typically receive subdued criticism—or even chauvinistic support—from Han populations for the use of violence, including live ammunition, against members of these minority ethnic groups. In Xinjiang, specifically, the semi-military XPCC governs a broad swath of the region more or less independently. Ongoing Chinese counterterrorism efforts focus on local and transnational Uighur populations,

---

[35] Edwin A. Winckler, "Military Dimensions of Regime Transition," in *Transition from Communism in China: Institutional and Comparative Analyses*, ed. Edwin A. Winckler (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 86. See also Chong-Pin Lin, "The Extramilitary Role of the People's Liberation Army in Modernization: Limits of Professionalization," *Security Studies* 1, no. 4 (1992): 659–89.

[36] For a discussion of mass reassignments and the difficulties of finding civilian jobs, see Shichor, "Demobilization," 343–44, 354.

[37] Not much is available in English on the Chinese militia system, but see James C.F. Wang, "The Urban Militia as a Political Instrument in the Power Contest in China in 1976," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 6 (1978); Wang, "China's Expenditure for the People's Armed Police and Militia"; and Andy Bunk, "Forgotten: A Look at the Changing Roles of the Chinese Militia System in the Communist Era from Its Inception to the Present," SinoDefence.com, 2007, http://www.sinodefence.com/research/militia/Militia-Forgotten.pdf.

groups that the state uses as justification for harsher control methods in the province.[38] Although the PRC has historically received much less foreign support for using labels like "terrorism" for violence in Tibet, due to international sympathy for the Tibetan cause, military and paramilitary forces are active in that region as well.

Finally, there continue to be reports of PLA soldiers actively participating in specific policing operations, although the attention that accompanies such events demonstrates how relatively unusual and significant such participation would be. Situations in which the PLA might plausibly be called on to participate in domestic security activities include suppressing widespread and violent unrest or alleged terrorism by ethnic minorities, most likely in Xinjiang or Tibet; cracking down on criminal or illicit commercial activities conducted with the involvement of PLA personnel, such as drug smuggling or the manufacturing of pirated CDs; and conducting raids on powerful and well-armed criminal organizations, where even the PAPF would be outmatched.[39]

The Challenges of the Information Age

Ideological and organizational issues have vexed China's domestic security forces since their origins in the 1920s. While these challenges have taken on different forms, they are not new. However, there are other issues that are more unique to the current era. One of the largest changes facing Chinese policing—the rapid expansion of information technology across China—has created a new arena for state-society relations by exposing governance problems and limitations to more public scrutiny and putting new communication tools in the hands of both the citizenry and the state. This challenge is not unique to Chinese domestic security. As the Arab Spring, the August 2011 London riots, and the 2011–12 Occupy Wall Street movement clearly demonstrated, the expansion of information technology currently complicates policing efforts in both the developed and developing worlds,

[38] For more on the often underappreciated role of the XPCC, see Yitzhak Shicor, "Company Province: Civil-Military Relations in Xinjiang," in Li, *Chinese Civil-Military Relations*, 135–50.

[39] For a serious examination of whether PLA forces were involved in suppressing the 2008 unrest in Tibet, in addition to a broader examination of this topic, see Tanner, "How China Manages Internal Security Challenges," 39–98. Andrew Mertha describes both "public security and military units" being involved in a crackdown on illegal CD factories with ties to the Ministry of the Electronics Industry, the PLA, and organized crime during the winter of 1996–97, although it is not entirely clear if PLA personnel were actually involved in the sting. Mertha notes that "if a more powerful unit can be identified and mobilized for the task at hand, even a military target can be brought down." Thus, even if soldiers were involved, this might be considered a case of PLA-on-PLA policing. See Andrew C. Mertha, *The Politics of Piracy: Intellectual Property in Contemporary China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 152–57.

as well as in both authoritarian and democratic countries. But given China's status as the world's largest and most influential authoritarian state, the results of its effort to take advantage of the benefits of these new technologies, while limiting their social and political impact, will have significant worldwide consequences. China has perhaps the most sophisticated media-control system in the world and a very capable domestic security apparatus. If its leaders are successful, other illiberal regimes (and even a few liberal or democratic ones) may adopt similar practices. More than a few dictators and technocrats already look to the CCP as a model of how to survive as a contemporary authoritarian regime, and all attempts to predict the collapse or democratization of the PRC have so far proved premature.

Scholars and professionals involved in Chinese policing are fully aware that the ubiquity of information technology will further test the ability of domestic security forces to adapt to changing social conditions. China's major policing journals now regularly feature articles on the difficulties of monitoring virtual communities, cell phone calls, text messages, and online games and discuss issues such as the impact of the Internet on traditional security and how to mitigate and pacify "networked mass incidents" (*wangluo quntixing shijian*). They also suggest that the prevalence of information technology complicates police-citizen relations by shining a spotlight on potentially controversial actions and opening the door for public criticism and outrage. Journal articles also frequently recommend improving the "informationization of public security" (*gong'an xinxihua*) to ensure that police forces have the technology and training to operate effectively in this new arena.[40]

President Bill Clinton once famously opined that Beijing's attempts to control the Internet were the equivalent of "trying to nail Jell-O to the wall." There is some truth to this idea, but the Chinese government has also structured the Internet and other information technologies specifically with social control in mind and has been willing and technically able to take extreme measures if necessary. The overwhelming majority of Chinese Internet and cell phone traffic operates on networks owned by the three big state-owned telecommunications companies—China Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile. All three are supervised by the Ministry of Information Industry, which is responsible for regulation and coordination in the telecommunications sector. State intervention in the area of information technology has been heavy-handed on multiple occasions. Following the 2009 riots in Xinjiang, for example, Internet access

[40] For an overview of recent topics of interest among Chinese police professionals and domestic security scholars, see the year-end indexes of major policing journals, such as "Gong'an yanjiu 2010 nian zong mulu" [Complete 2010 Index of Policing Studies], *Gong'an Yanjiu* 194 (2010); and "Gong'an yanjiu 2011 nian zong mulu" [Complete 2011 Index of Policing Studies], *Gong'an Yanjiu* 206 (2011).

in the entire province was cut for nearly ten months, something that was previously considered to be unthinkable.[41] Additionally, on April 12, 2012, there was a massive Internet outage on both the China Telecom and China Unicom networks. This was either a bizarre accident or an attempt at testing whether the entire system could be shut down if the state felt sufficiently threatened.[42] Other less extreme measures include repeated attempts to require all Internet users to register with their real names and identities, making them easier to monitor and control. While all previous policies in this regard have seen their implementation delayed, often due to user resistance, a new policy was just announced in late December 2012, requiring users to provide their real names to Internet service providers. Since the Chinese providers are all state-owned enterprises, this policy will essentially give the government easy access to user identities and reduce the overall anonymity of online activities in China—assuming that this effort at regulation is more effective than previous campaigns.[43]

On the policing side, when the Internet arrived in China around 1997 and began to expand rapidly, the outdated ideas that still dominated public security work under Jiang Zemin were in most cases simply expanded to include cyberspace. While there have been several efforts both within and outside domestic security organs to develop a more progressive, open-minded view of the freedom and potential of the Internet, the leading public security officials often still see something similar in character to other perceived threats. Consequently, the director of Hainan Province's public security department recently reported that "the virtual nature, openness, and other features of the Internet…have already made it a tool for the Westernization and splitist efforts of hostile foreign and domestic forces."[44] The police chief of Sichuan Province arrived at a similar conclusion:

> Hostile foreign and domestic forces increasingly use the Internet and other emerging media as important tools and channels for various strategies to promote a color revolution against us, forming various parties and groups to compete for the battlefield of public opinion, the people's hearts and minds, and the support of the international community, even conducting disruptive and destructive activities online.[45]

---

[41] Chris Hogg, "China Restores Xinjiang Internet," BBC News, May 14, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8682145.stm.

[42] Paul Mozur, "New Clarity on China Internet Outage," *Wall Street Journal*, China Real Time Report, web log, April 13, 2012.

[43] Keith Bradsher, "China Toughens Its Restrictions on Use of the Internet," *New York Times*, December 28, 2012.

[44] Jia Dongjun, "Wangluo meiti xunmeng fazhan dui shehui wending de yingxiang ji yingdui cuoshi luelun" [The Impact of the Rapid Development of Internet Media on Social Stability and Some Brief Comments on Responsive Measures], *Gong'an Yanjiu* 199 (2011): 5.

[45] Zeng, "Xin shiqi gong'an," 10–11.

This orthodox view of the Internet continues to dominate thinking on domestic security in China, significantly restricting the range of possible approaches and solutions that can be considered for addressing the often legitimate concerns held by Chinese policing professionals.

Ideas on how to reassert traditional monitoring-and-control capabilities over society persist and are especially evident in the way Internet policing is handled. Rather than giving up control over the virtual sectors of society, the Chinese state has made various attempts to create order through registration and monitoring schemes, including the failed initiative to have the state's Green Dam software installed on every computer in China, various proposed real-name registration systems for Internet users, and licensing requirements for all websites. Other labor-intensive methods include the establishment of thousands of "Internet police" (*wangluo jingcha*) within the public security bureaucracy, who are charged with monitoring and reporting illegal or highly political activities taking place online, and the recruitment of thousands of "50-cent party" members (*wumao dang*), who attempt to guide conversations on online message boards and other forums by writing posts that are nationalistic and supportive of the government.[46] This impulse to monitor and control, rather than consider looser measures to manage Internet and cell phone activities, often leads to greater problems when the public reacts negatively to state or police efforts to control information and decides to use newly available tools to develop its own understanding of events. For example, one public security official describes the following episode:

> During the 2008 Weng'an incident in Guizhou, because the information dissemination speed of the Internet age is unprecedented and our government departments are still used to covering up everything with an information blackout, rumors spread much more quickly than the truth, resulting in misunderstandings, incorrect talk, and even a sense of panic among the masses, eventually leading to a serious mass incident. Traditional mass media is no match for the openness of Internet media, and this is a new challenge for public security in handling cases.[47]

While such problems are increasingly recognized within police circles, it is difficult to find viable solutions that satisfy the more traditional ideological viewpoints

[46] The nickname "50-cent party" was coined by Chinese Internet users based on the amount the government, often an office connected to the Ministry of Culture, supposedly pays members of this group to write a patriotic post.

[47] Xue Dianwu, "Wangluo shidai hexie jingmin guanxi jianshe mianlin de jiyu he tianzhan" [Opportunities and Challenges Facing the Construction of Harmonious Police-Community Relations in the Internet Era], *Gong'an Yanjiu* 196 (2011): 77.

as well as the demand for harsh crackdowns among the domestic security leadership. Even public security officials who aspire to combine traditional and modern thinking about policing and apply it to the Internet end up erring on the side of the status quo rather than pushing Chinese policing into new territory. The public security director of Sichuan Province describes the situation as follows:

> The virtual society of the Internet creates many kinds of shocks and effects for our actual society, requiring public security organs to conform to the development trends of the times and effectively strengthen their thinking regarding the dual but combined battlefields of online and offline, striving to upgrade their ability to comprehensively control both virtual and actual societies:
>
> 1. *Proper coordination.* Fully recognizing that the struggle for the Internet is a special form that public security work must take under these new conditions and that the online battlefield is an important position to hold if public security organs are to conscientiously perform their duties, [we must] effectively coordinate online and offline efforts, integrate the use of both soft and hard methods, and ensure victory on both of these two battlefields….
> 2. *Accurate assessments.* [We must] continually improve the ability to collect and aggregate both online and offline intelligence and actively seek to build an intelligence collection network that combines open and classified, domestic and overseas, online and offline, and human- and technologically obtained information, building a comprehensive collection of confidential, actionable, timely, and verified intelligence to maximize foresight, warning, and prevention.
> 3. *Effective guidance.* [We must]…effectively practice the guidance of online public opinion, establishing a press correspondent system and a crisis response system to handle public opinion involving police in order to prevent a negative impact on the stability of actual society, create innovative methods of guiding public opinion, cultivate a specialized Internet commentary team, guide the positive development of public opinion, and ultimately prevent online opinions from becoming offline hazards.
> 4. *Effective control.* [We must] uphold the opening and actualization of the virtual world, learn from the traditional policing models for the actual world, extend our monitoring and management of websites, forums, and blogs to encompass QQ [a chat service], Kaixin [a social networking site], and other online communities, give monitoring responsibilities at various levels to the Internet Monitoring Department, implement a strict real-name registration system, and comprehensively establish a real world–style management system for virtual society, building a comprehensive, three-dimensional prevention and control network both online and offline.[48]

[48] Zeng, "Xin shiqi gong'an," 11–12.

Even the more progressive suggestions given here are described in terms that resemble the traditional monitor-and-control approach and seem to be relatively toothless when it comes to actually tackling the issues that lie at the heart of current policing difficulties and the challenges posed by the Internet. These are not ambitious and farsighted solutions to the problems on the horizon, but attempts to make up for lost time, indicating that thinking on these issues remains several steps removed from present circumstances.

The outrage over the death of Sun Zhigang and the subsequent exposure of the black-market detention system for petitioners were both conducted largely through the Internet. Indeed, the Sun Zhigang case was originally praised as an example of online public opinion that led to measurable changes in China's approach to policing. Despite the incomplete adjustment that seems to have been made, public security officials acknowledge that "the rapid dissemination [of information] on the Internet has created higher expectations for public security work…[and] the openness of Internet media forces the police to work in a more transparent environment."[49] A Shanghai-based public security task force even noted that "informationization has led the public to have greater expectations for public security organs….In an information society, the public has a greatly improved capacity to stay informed on social issues, since everyone can easily obtain the actual facts through various information channels."[50]

This ability of the public to more easily monitor and uncover information about police abuses places additional pressure on existing principal-agent problems. Previously, central leaders were able to pass the buck to local leaders, allowing them to be the ones to use harsh tactics or hired thugs to suppress protests with tacit support or at least silence from the central government. Now, the increased publicity generated by especially heinous injustices or the mishandling of protests frequently leads to public demands for state intervention that are more difficult to ignore because of their widespread circulation on the Internet. Especially under the Hu-Wen administration, which publicly pledged to do a better job of responding to the broad will of the masses, it has been more difficult for central authorities to stay silent and impassive and still maintain their legitimacy with the younger generations, who are driven partially by nationalism to demand great things of China and its leadership. The public security director of Hainan Province offers the following analysis:

---

[49] Xu, "Wangluo shidai jingmin guanxi," 77.

[50] Shanghai Public Security Department Pudong Sub-Bureau Task Force, "Xinxihua tiaojian xia jingwu gongzuo tizhi jizhi de gaige yu chuangxin" [Reform and Innovation in the Institutional Mechanisms of Police Work under Informationized Conditions], *Gong'an Yanjiu* 198 (2011): 12.

> Online and offline activities related to mass incidents are synergistic and intertwined. In the information age, Internet media can cause mass incidents by gaining the attention of a vast number of Internet users and can accelerate its deterioration [into a worse crisis], complicating management efforts. First, online mass incidents are a significant trend…. Networked groups and online communities have a strong capacity for social organization and mobilization and have already become important venues for a series of illegal activities by organizations that disseminate harmful information. On active forums, communities, blogs, and other sites, a few posts are reproduced repeatedly or spread by instant messaging, email, and other methods, quickly forming a network of public opinion. Inspired by certain social and political issues of public concern, Internet users draw on the large-scale dissemination power of the Internet to release and spread certain kinds of information, venting their discontent and relying on networked IT to communicate with each other in a long chain, planning, organizing, and liaising [with others], easily evolving into a mass incident based around specific demands. Second, Internet media can accelerate the development of mass incidents. Currently, stories involving the wealthy, corruption, police cases (or incidents), or other subjects can easily become hot topics for Internet public opinion, and some have even been used to create massive crises. Especially because the contradictions in our country's society are currently relatively numerous, various interest groups increasingly use the Internet to express their demands, some even drawing on the help of professional "Internet promoters" or "online public relations firms" to spread hype with ulterior motives.[51]

In May 2011, the journal *Red Flag Essays*—which is closely tied to the CCP's domestic propaganda efforts—published its response to a reader who asked, "Why are countries in the Middle East and North Africa experiencing such dramatic changes?" The journal's answer included poverty, unequal distribution of wealth, rising unemployment among young people, corruption, "calcification" and the lack of reform, and, last of all, the Internet. The author argued:

> During the unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries, mobilization orders were released and disseminated through the Internet and microblogging sites. Twitter, Facebook, and other similar microblogs were indispensible in stirring up unrest…The Internet in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa lacks the necessary supervision. The Iran election crisis of 2009 also occurred under the encouragement and facilitation of the Internet and microblogging sites.[52]

---

[51] Jia, "Wangluo meiti xunmeng fazhan," 6.

[52] Tang Jizan, "Zhongdong, Beifei guojia weisheme hui chuxian dongluan?" [Why Are Countries in the Middle East and North Africa Experiencing Turmoil?], *Hongqi wengao*, May 2011, 38.

At first glance, it appears that the CCP leadership is much savvier about the potential for political unrest, having spent the last several decades actively guarding against it. However, as Guobin Yang asserts, "Chinese leaders have a firm grasp of the situation: they understand the power of the Internet much better than their Middle Eastern counterparts….Yet rather than resolving the underlying sources of instability, the government all too often offers short-term, superficial solutions."[53] Part of this short-term focus may have to do with the fact that it is difficult to "restructure a hierarchical system in which the senior ranks are technologically illiterate in comparison with their subordinates."[54] This is especially the case when young, tech-savvy public security personnel have the option of seeking a much more lucrative career in the private sector rather than enduring continual frustration in government. Consequently, those involved in long-term planning on how the Chinese state and its public security organs should respond to the Internet may not have the best sense of where information technology is headed and what its capabilities will soon be, leaving China more vulnerable than it may seem.

Conclusion

The real issue that confronts China's domestic security system is not actually an immediate concern about regime survival but the question of how difficult the next few decades will be for state-society relations. The challenges facing the PRC in the contemporary era are formidable, and the central government shows little sign of being able to aggressively tackle some of the long-term underlying issues such as elite accountability and effective forms of redress. This is mostly due to macro-level issues involving internal party politics and the commitment to practicing incremental reform. There will be no shortage of protests, crime, poor governance, corruption, and a variety of abuses over the next several decades—to a great extent, these are simply part of the process of industrialization and urbanization. The transformation that China is undertaking is not an easy one, however fantastic its growth rates. Indeed, once China's economic expansion slows or encounters major issues—something that appears inevitable in the long run—social tensions will become even more pronounced. The United States' own experiences of industrialization were hardly free of internal

[53] Guobin Yang, "China's Gradual Revolution," *New York Times*, March 13, 2011.

[54] Christopher R. Hughes, "Review Essay: China and the Internet—A Question of Politics or Management?" *China Quarterly* 175 (2003): 823.

conflict.[55] The real questions for China's public security officials and reformers, then, are how difficult need this process be, how many people need suffer, and how much social disruption and chaos need occur before China emerges as a developed country? The preparations and organizational structures that Chinese leaders put in place now—including, one hopes, significant political reforms enacted by the central government—will go a long way toward making the process either easier or more difficult for everyone involved, average citizens and police alike.

No one truly knows how long the current Communist Party regime will persist. If political reforms eventually come from the top in response to growing pressure from below, as happened in Taiwan and South Korea, the United States may well be dealing with the remnants of China's current government for a very long time. Regardless, it is in the interests of both China and the United States for Chinese policing to become more consistent, less violent, more effective, and more grounded in proper legal procedures that protect individual rights. Although their personal aspirations are often glossed over in large-scale analyses of China's domestic unrest, there are many ambitious and forward-thinking Chinese police officers who want to develop world-class expertise in policing methods and to preserve China's domestic security without unnecessarily harming state-society relations through violence and other harsh methods.

Consequently, it may also be in the interests of the United States and the cause of human rights in China to strengthen existing U.S. collaborations with Chinese policing institutions—such as through security consulting and international police exchanges—to encourage movement toward more modern and international standards of police conduct. Joint efforts against transnational crime are also worth pursuing.[56] Of course, Washington should not be naïve and provide open-ended assistance to Chinese policing organizations. What the United States and China consider to be criminal activities or terrorism are sometimes very different, and Washington must be wary of the danger that U.S. technology and training intended to monitor and control violent crime may be used in China against political targets and ethnic and religious minorities.[57] However,

[55] U.S. labor history, for example, includes companies paying workers in scrip rather than real money and hiring private security firms such as the Pinkerton Detective Agency to break up strikes. The United States has previously experienced many of the domestic challenges that China is currently facing and has a great deal of wisdom to offer if China is interested in learning from past successes and mistakes.

[56] See, for example, the description of FBI cooperation on a child pornography case in "Chinese Police Chief Vows International Cooperation in Fighting Internet Crimes," Xinhua, August 30, 2011.

[57] For further discussion of the possible benefits and dangers, see Matthew Hilburn, "China Studies U.S. to Revamp Police Force," Voice of America, June 5, 2012; and Shirley A. Khan, "U.S.-China Counterterrorism Cooperation: Issues for U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, RL33001, May 7, 2009.

there is plenty the United States can do to improve China's ability to more peacefully manage internal conflict that promotes rather than compromises U.S. and international values. While Chinese police forces are certainly interested in technological solutions, in truth organizational, training, and ideological weaknesses are at the root of the majority of the issues they face, and those are the areas where U.S. cooperation could be most useful.

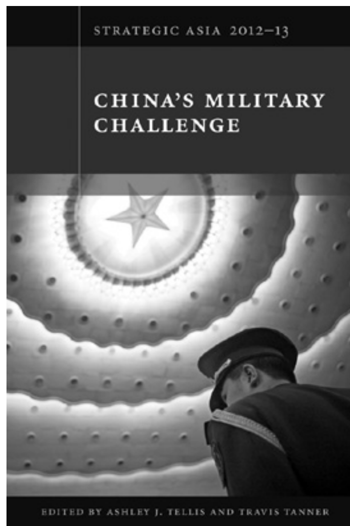
What China most needs to learn from the experience of other states is how to refrain from using the police in an instrumental fashion and accept that many situations exist where monitoring, detention, and repression are not viable options. Although that reality has been acknowledged in the past, a real shift in domestic security policy will be difficult for central leaders to consistently support if they see no alternative methods for ensuring the regime's persistent and dominant role in managing major social institutions (such as education, the media, industry, labor, and religion). Beliefs about Chinese exceptionalism—that China's situation is so unique that foreign solutions will not work—also hinder the regime's process of becoming less paranoid and controlling. Yet the Chinese state is in many ways naïvely ignorant about how to manage a modern, diverse, mobile, contentious, and often unruly society. Its leaders will need to learn, and the hard way is much less pleasant than learning from the mistakes that other developed countries, including the United States, have made along their own paths to modernization.

The CCP ultimately needs to allow Chinese society the freedom to organize itself more independently of the state. It needs to trust that its people want the country to thrive and grow and that they do not seek to tear down all the positive things created over the past few decades. The leadership also needs, as several Chinese scholars have pointed out, to become less convinced that all social unrest is inherently threatening to state stability.[58] That means working to achieve greater confidence and legitimacy rather than being suspicious of its own people and trying to control them. If police abuses can be curtailed and citizens are given effective means of seeking justice, the popular belief that only massive unrest leads to results—"a small disturbance leads to a small solution, a large disturbance leads to a big solution, [and] no disturbance leads to no solution"—will no longer seem to suggest the way forward for a dissatisfied Chinese public.[59]

---

[58] Yu Jianrong and Wang Yukai, "Escaping the Stability Quagmire Starts with Desensitization," *International Herald Ledger*, January 3, 2010, translated by the Duihua Foundation's *Human Rights Journal*, January 4, 2011, http://www.duihuahrjournal.org/2011/01/translation-escaping-stability-quagmire.html.

[59] Elizabeth Rosenthal, "Workers' Plight Brings New Militancy in China," *New York Times*, March 10, 2003.



STRATEGIC ASIA 2012–13

CHINA'S MILITARY CHALLENGE

Edited by Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner

The National Bureau of Asian Research • October 2012 • 428 pp
ISBN 978-0-9818904-2-5 (paperback) • ISBN 978-1-939131-10-2 (PDF)
$34.95 (paperback) • $19.95 (PDF)

ORDER ONLINE AT WWW.NBR.ORG/PUBLICATIONS

About the Book

In *Strategic Asia 2012–13: China's Military Challenge,* leading experts assess and forecast the impact of China's growing military capabilities. What are China's strategic aims? What are the challenges and opportunities facing the United States? How is the region responding to China's military power and to the U.S. policy of "strategic rebalancing"?

Recent Strategic Asia Volumes Include

Strategic Asia 2011–12: Asia Responds to Its Rising Powers—China and India
Strategic Asia 2010–11: Asia's Rising Power and America's Continued Purpose
Strategic Asia 2009–10: Economic Meltdown and Geopolitical Stability
Strategic Asia 2008–09: Challenges and Choices
Strategic Asia 2007–08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy

How to Order

To order, please fill out the form below or visit http://www.nbr.org/publications. The full volume is available in print and electronic formats. Individual chapters can be downloaded for $4.95 each. Previous volumes in the series are available at http://www.nbr.org/publications.

2012–13 Price Information
Full volume – paperback $34.95
Full volume – electronic copy $19.95
Individual chapter – electronic copy $4.95

Shipping and handling:
Within North America – add $8 for first book and $2 for each additional book
Outside North America – add $16 for first book and $8 for each addition book.
Resellers, please contact orders@nbr.org for pricing and shipping.

Name____

Organization_______________________________________

Address____

City_______________ State_____________ Zip Code____________

Phone______________________ Fax______________________

E-Mail_____________________________

Method of payment:

Check ❑ Money order ❑ Credit card (Visa, MasterCard, or Amex) ❑

Card number______________________________________ Expiration date_____________

Signature_______________________________________ Date______________________

Send order form with payment to: The National Bureau of Asian Research • 1414 NE 42nd Street, Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98105 • Phone (206) 632-7370 • Fax (206) 632-7487 • Email: orders@nbr.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview

Uphill Challenges: China's Military Modernization and Asian Security
Ashley J. Tellis, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and NBR

Emerging Chinese Military Capabilities

China's Land Forces: New Priorities and Capabilities
Roy Kamphausen, NBR

China's Modernization of Its Naval and Air Power Capabilities
Andrew S. Erickson, U.S. Naval War College

The Second Artillery Force and the Future of Long-Range Precision Strike
Mark A. Stokes, Project 2049 Institute

Controlling the Information Domain: Space, Cyber, and Electronic Warfare
Kevin Pollpeter, Defense Group Inc.

Regional Studies

China's Military Modernization: U.S. Allies and Partners in Northeast Asia
Christopher W. Hughes, University of Warwick

Southeast Asia and Australia: Case Studies in Responding to China's Military Power
Andrew Shearer, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet

China's Military Modernization: Responses from India
Arun Sahgal, Institute of National Security Studies

U.S. Reponses

The U.S. Response to China's Military Modernization
Dan Blumenthal, American Enterprise Institute

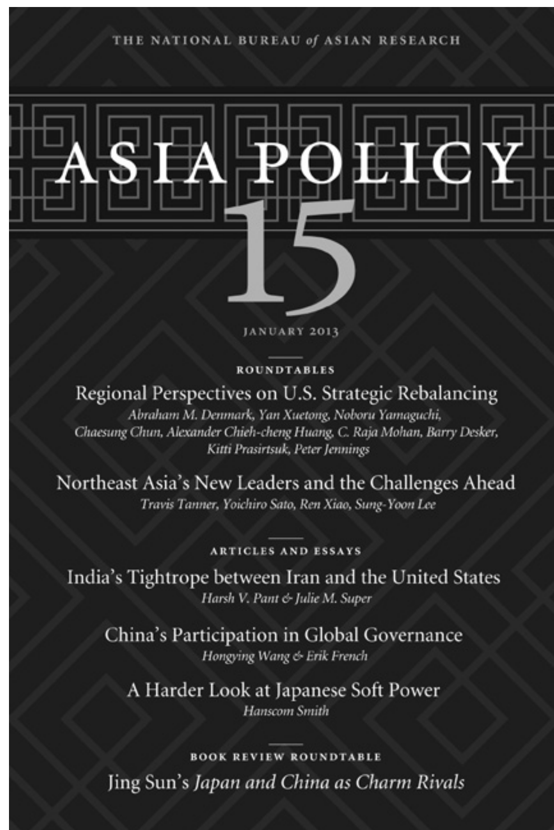
Special Study

China's Vision of World Order
Thomas Fingar, Stanford University

THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH

ASIA POLICY

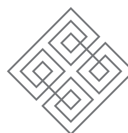
A peer-reviewed journal devoted to bridging the gap between academic research and policymaking on issues related to the Asia-Pacific



Asia Policy **publishes, in descending order of emphasis, three types of peer-reviewed essays:**

- ***social scientific research articles*** **that both use social science theories, concepts, and approaches and draw clear and concise policy implications on issues of import to the region**
- ***research notes*** **that present, in a well-organized format, new, important, and even exploratory conceptual frameworks or descriptive information of use to policymakers, especially on topics that have traditionally been underrepresented in the literature**
- ***policy analyses*** **that present original, persuasive, analytically rigorous, and clear and concise research-based argumentation on policy matters**

Asia Policy welcomes the submission of policy-related research on important issues in the Asia-Pacific. Submissions may be sent to SUBMISSIONS@NBR.ORG.



Yearly subscription rates within North America are $35 for individuals and $95 for institutions. Yearly subscription rates outside North America are $65 for individuals and $125 for institutions. Two-year subscriptions receive a $10 discount. Subscription orders can be placed at ORDERS@NBR.ORG.

http://asiapolicy.nbr.org