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'XI JINPING'S NEW SECURITY SATRAPS'

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China's powerful security apparatus has become even more important for Xi Jinping as he makes a bid for a third term at China's helm at the upcoming 20th Party Congress in 2022. The unease and dissatisfaction simmering just below the surface make it imperative that the security is unquestioningly loyal to Xi.

2. The appointment on November 19 of Wang Xiaohong, a long-time associate of Chinese President Xi Jinping, as Secretary of the Ministry of Public Security's Party Committee makes it certain that he will replace Zhao Kezhi as Minister of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), at least in the short term. Zhao Kezhi is 68 years old and due to retire. The appointment is out of the ordinary as it is normally the Minister who is concurrently Secretary of the Party Committee of the Ministry. News of the appointment comes within days of the conclusion of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC)'s Sixth Plenum (November 8-11), suggesting that the Plenum considered personnel appointments, which will finally be announced after the 20th Party Congress late next year. Wang Xiaohong's appointment also coincides with the intensive purge, or cleansing, of China's security apparatus -- called by Party cadres as "the knife handle" -- which now appears to be in its final stages.
3. The choice of Wang Xiaohong to head the sensitive Ministry of Public Security (MPS) is undoubtedly deliberate. The months leading up to the 20th Party Congress scheduled for late next year are crucial for Xi Jinping who is making a bid for a third term. After Mao Zedong, Chinese leaders have not continued in office for more than two terms. If appointed Minister MPS, 64-year old Wang Xiaohong, who is a member of the 19th CCP CC, can be expected to be promoted to State Councillor or Politburo member and will probably hold this powerful post till almost the 21st Party Congress in 2027. It is equally likely that Xi promotes him after the 20th Party Congress to the Politburo to head the all-powerful Central Political and Legal Committee.
4. There are, additionally, signs of enhanced political activity, albeit subterranean, which suggest that Xi's opponents are active thus raising the stakes. Clear pointers were the charges levelled against former Vice Minister of Public Security Sun Lijun which included "forming gangs" and even "causing extreme danger to the political security [of the party]" – code for Xi! The uncertainty implies that Xi will not give even a hint of weakness by relaxing policies. This includes his aggressive foreign policy which will continue to pose a risk for China's neighbours.

5. Wang Xiaohong convened a meeting of the Ministry of Public Security's Party Committee on November 21, within days of being appointed its Secretary, where, according to HongKong's Sing Tao Daily, he emphasized that "purging out Sun Lijun and other people's poisonous influence should be placed in a more prominent position, and resolutely eliminate political hidden dangers." The implication is that more dismissals can be expected.

6. Sing Tao Daily also reported on November 23, that Wang Xiaohong is placing his former loyal subordinates at leadership-level in the MPS to replace those dismissed. Identified among them are the former Vice Governor and Director of Public Security of Henan, Xu Ganlu who has very recently been inducted as Vice Minister in the MPS. Wang Xiaohong's subordinate in the Fujian Public Security, Lin Rui, is another who has been appointed MPS Vice Minister. The Vice Minister and Director of the First Bureau (China Domestic Political Security Bureau) Chen Siyuan is a former subordinate of Wang Xiaohong in the Beijing Public Security Bureau. Another subordinate of Wang Xiaohong's in the Henan Public Security, Feng Yan, has been appointed Director of the Political Department. With these appointments and those yet to come, Wang Xiaohong is clearly ensuring that the MPS stays loyal to him and Xi.

7. Wang Xiaohong has a long and close association with Xi and is counted among his closest friends. He began his career in Fujian, where he remained until August 2013. Wang Xiaohong was Xi Jinping's subordinate during the latter's entire term in Fujian. In December 2013, Wang Xiaohong was appointed Deputy Governor of Henan province in charge of the provincial public security department. Wang Xiaohong served 34 years (1993-2013) in Fujian and held positions such as Director of the Minhou County Public Security Bureau and Director of the Fuzhou Public Security Bureau. He later became police chief of Xiamen, before moving to Henan province.

8. Wang Xiaohong was promoted to the post of Director of Public Security of Beijing in March 2015. That he was trusted by Xi is evident from not only his appointment as Police Chief of Beijing (2015-2020) – a job entrusted only to a person of the CCP CC General Secretary's confidence – but that he was concurrently Deputy Mayor of Beijing, Party Secretary of the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau, and the Director of the Public Security Bureau. He was appointed Vice Minister of Public Security in May 2016. A source has reportedly disclosed: "I have heard Wang served as a ban lang (the best man or head groomsman) at Xi Jinping's private wedding with Peng Liyuan, attended by only close relatives. They are so close to each other."

9. The most important post in China's security apparatus is that of the Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee who is a member of the CCP Politburo. The Central Political and Legal Committee supervises and is directly responsible for the MPS, Ministry of State Security (MoSS) and Procuratorate. The Minister of Public Security often takes over as Secretary of the Political and Legal Committee, but this year the incumbent MPS Minister Zhao Kezhi and Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee Guo Shengkun are likely to retire at the same time. This could provide an opportunity for Wang Xiaohong to be promoted to the Politburo and appointed Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee. Xi loyalist, Chen Yixin, already Secretary General of the Central Political and Legal Committee, could be another contender.

10. Born in 1959 in Zhejiang Province, Chen Yixin is a ‘Cultural Revolution Rusticated Youth’. He joined the CCP in 1982. Having spent his entire career in Zhejiang Province, Chen Yixin was Secretary of the Wenzhou City Party Committee from 2013-2015 when he is reputed to have played a central role in helping it recover from its worst debt crisis in decades. Xi Jinping brought Chen Yixin, already regarded a rapidly rising cadre of the loosely labelled ‘Zhejiang faction’, to Beijing as Deputy Director of the CCP CC’s Central Leading Small Group (LSG) for Comprehensively Deepening Reform in the General Office. The CLSG was created by Xi Jinping and is chaired by him. In 2018, Chen Yixin was appointed to the powerful post of Secretary General of the Central Political and Legal Committee. In April 2020, Chen Yixin initiated a thorough ‘rectification’ of the entire security apparatus, comprising the MPS, MoSS, Central Political and Legal Committee, Supervisory Commission, Procuratorate etc, which he described as “a self-restoration with the blade inward and bone scraping to cure the poison”.

11. Chen Yixin is an Alternate Member of the 19th CCP CC and a year younger than Wang Xiaohong. In case Xi promotes Wang Xiaohong to the Politburo and the powerful job of Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee, he could appoint Chen Yixin as Minister MPS and promote him as State Councillor. With age on his side, Chen Yixin could then wait till 2027 for elevation to the Politburo, unless Xi decides to use his talents in the economic sphere.

12. Yet another candidate for elevation to the Politburo and choice for the powerful post of Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee is Chen Wenqing, a member of the 19th CCP CC. Born in 1960, Chen Wenqing is younger than Wang Xiaohong or Chen Yixin. Chen Wenqing is a professional security cadre and well acquainted with the central security apparatus after Xi named him Deputy Director of the Central State Security Office, part of the new Central State Security Commission (CSSC) set up by Xi to tighten party oversight of the security apparatus, in May 2018. If appointed Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee, Chen Wenqing will bring to his job the experience of ordinary police work as well as that of the more sophisticated domestic security and foreign intelligence. In view of China’s current hostile external environment, Chen Wenqing’s experience may be considered useful.

13. Chen Wenqing is also a ‘Red Descendent’ -- his father was in the Sichuan Province Public Security -- and, after graduation, he entered the Ministry of Public Security in 1984. In 1988, he was decorated for bravery for his role in the capture of two armed criminals. Chen Wenqing moved to the MoSS in 1994 and became Deputy Director at the Sichuan provincial State Security Department. He was appointed Director of the State Security Department in Sichuan in 1998 and held this position until 2002, when he was appointed Chief Prosecutor at the Sichuan provincial People’s Procuratorate. In 2006, Chen Wenqing moved to Fujian, where he served until 2012 as Deputy Party Secretary and concurrently head of the provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection. Following the 18th Party Congress at which Xi came to power, Chen Wenqing was brought to Beijing to become one of the Deputy Secretaries of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC). He was appointed Party Secretary of the MoSS in October 2016 and MoSS Minister in November.

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