

The Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party oversees the vast coercive apparatus of the party-state. Its main responsibilities include providing policy proposals on domestic security, supervising implementation of the party's domestic security agenda, coordinating the actions of law enforcement and the judiciary, and ensuring the political loyalty of officials in law enforcement agencies. In the 1980s, the most open period in post-Mao China, the role and power of the commission were limited. But as the CCP leadership became more conservative in the post-Tiananmen period, the commission was granted more power to strengthen domestic security. It is now the CCP's principal enforcer to maintain the supremacy of the party over the state's coercive apparatus and an essential institution in organizing surveillance, supervising campaigns of repression, and providing for public safety.

The Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (CPLAC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is among the most powerful organizations of the party-state. Its members include the heads of all domestic and national security agencies, the People's Armed Police, and the presidents of the supreme court and procuratorate.¹ The commission is responsible for translating the party's orders on domestic security into implementable policies, coordinating actions among various security agencies, supervising the work of the courts and procuratorates, and overseeing implementation of high-priority tasks, such as high-tech surveillance systems, new law-and-order initiatives, and crackdowns on dissent and potential organized opposition. Most of its current members are loyalists of General Secretary Xi Jinping, who counts the domestic security apparatus, along with the military and the party's anti-corruption agency, as his base of power. The incumbent secretary of the CPLAC, Guo Shengkun (郭声琨), 66, is a former minister of Public Security and a member of the Politburo. Its sole deputy secretary, Zhao Kezhi (赵克志), 67, is minister of Public Security and a state councillor (a rank equal to a vice premier) and, based on his biography, a close associate of Li Zhanshu (栗战书), the current chairman of the National People's Congress and one of Xi's most loyal colleagues.

Secretary-general of the commission, Chen Yixin (陈一新), 62, is a rising star who once worked under Xi in Zhejiang. Chen oversees routine operations of the commission as Guo's righthand man. Since 2007, the party has promoted the minister of Public Security to head the CPLAC (Guo and his two predecessors, Zhou Yongkang and Meng Jianzhu, all served as minister of Public Security before heading the commission). But because Zhao Kezhi, at 67, may be too old to be promoted to the head of the commission after Guo's term expires late next year at the party's 20th National Congress, Chen Yixin is now seen as a favorite to lead the commission

¹ <http://www.chinapeace.gov.cn/chinapeace/c100009/ldbdshtml>, accessed July 11, 2021.

when Guo steps down in late 2022. As deputy director of the Leading Group on Education and Rectification of the Nation's Political-Legal Ranks (全国政法队伍教育整顿领导小组) and the director of the Office of the Leading Group in charge of its daily operations, Chen is Xi's point-man leading the ongoing purge of the CCP's coercive apparatus.²

The other members of the commission include Zhou Qiang (周强), president of the Supreme People's Court, Zhang Jun (张军), head of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, Chen Wenqing (陈文清), minister of State Security, Tang Yijun (唐一军), minister of Justice who also worked under Xi in Zhejiang, Wang Chunqing (王春宁), commander of the People's Armed Police, and Wang Renhua (王仁华), who heads the Political-Legal Commission of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Despite the power and role of the CPLAC in domestic security affairs, we know relatively little about this vital CCP organ because its work is shrouded in secrecy. In this essay we hope to shed some light on the CPLAC by first tracing its evolution as the CCP's taskmaster for domestic security. We then try to gain more insights into its functions and operations by examining open-source materials about the party's local political-legal committees, for which more information is available.

Evolution of the CPLAC

The “political-legal” sector encompasses a wide range of bureaucracies. Besides courts and procuratorates, this sector includes the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and local public security bureaus (PSBs), the Ministry of State Security (MSS) and its local agencies, the People's Armed Police, the Ministry of Justice (which also oversees prisons) and its local agencies, and police academies. As revealed by Chen Yixin, close to 2.7 million officials and law enforcement personnel work in the “political-legal” sector.

Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, the CCP has had tight control over this critical pillar of repression through a specialized committee or its permutations. Rudimentary central, provincial, and prefectural political and legal affairs commissions were established in 1951, but they were part of the state, not the CCP. In 1956, the CCP set up its own “Central Law Committee.” Its limited role was to ensure that the policies of the CCP Center were implemented by various bureaucracies. In 1958, the CCP established the Central Legal and Political Affairs Small Group. Subsequently, CCP committees in provinces, prefectures, and counties all set up political and legal affairs small groups inside their CCP committees and empowered these groups to coordinate the work of law enforcement agencies. However, the group's power of coordination was restricted to the resolution of major criminal cases or legal disputes. It had no role in formulating, implementing, or coordinating social control and surveillance measures. During the Cultural Revolution, as chaos engulfed the country, political and legal affairs groups ceased to function. After the Cultural Revolution, the CCP re-established the Central Political and Legal Small Group and gave it a limited mandate to conduct research on major policy issues and assist the work of the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of

² “政法队伍教育整顿教育，全国 12576 名干警投案，” <https://www.infzm.com/contents/207864>, accessed July 11, 2021.

Public Security, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs. In 1980, the CCP re-established the CPLAC, with an expanded mandate. The CPLAC, as well as the local political-legal committees (PLCs) that were established soon thereafter, now exercise oversight power over the entire political-legal sector.³

According to the document of the CCP Center that announced the re-establishment of the CPLAC in 1980, the PLCs were formally a functional department of the party. Their responsibilities included “maintaining communication and providing guidance to the various departments in the political and legal sector; assisting party committees and organization departments to evaluate and manage cadres; organizing and conducting research on policy, law, and theory; coordinating joint meetings to deal with major and difficult cases; and organizing and pushing forward implementation of ‘comprehensive social management.’”⁴ Despite their expanded authority, the PLCs were not directly involved in routine operations or decisions of the state’s legal and law enforcement apparatus. The reference in this document to their task of implementing unspecified “comprehensive management,” however, foreshadows their central role in organizing the surveillance state more than a decade later.

For a brief moment in May 1988, reformers led by General Secretary Zhao Ziyang seeking to separate the party from the state abolished the CPLAC and replaced it with a Central Political and Legal Affairs Leading Group with limited power. But because of the turnover in June 1989, they did not have time to implement the reform below the national level, leaving most provincial and local PLCs intact (only nine provincial PLCs were abolished). Soon after the Tiananmen crackdown, the party re-established the CPLAC.⁵

As defined by the CCP Center’s announcement about the re-establishment of the CPLAC in 1990, the principal mission of the PLCs was to provide “macro-level guidance and coordination” for work in the political-legal sector and to act as an adviser and assistant to the party committees.” The specific responsibilities of the local PLCs were to be determined by the provincial party committees. Furthermore, the operational arms of the PLCs were to “conduct research, and not interfere in the affairs of various political-legal departments.” The PLCs are subordinate to the party committees at the same level, but they receive guidance from the superior PLCs. The 1990 document also elevated the political status of the PLCs by stipulating that the secretary of a PLC must be a deputy party chief or a member of the standing committee of the party organization at the same level.⁶

³周永坤，“论党委政法委员会之改革，”法学 5 (2012): 3–13; 刘忠，“政法委的构成与运，”环球法律评论, no. 3 (2017): 16–38.

⁴“中共中央关于加强政法工作的指示，”<http://www.71.cn/2011/0930/632692.shtml>, accessed June 3, 2021.

⁵刘忠，“政法委的构成与运作，” 34.

⁶“中共中央关于维护社会稳定加强政法工作的通知，”<http://www.reformdata.org/1990/0402/4106.shtml>, accessed June 3, 2021.

Starting in the mid-1990s, the party gradually increased the power of the PLCs and expanded their responsibilities.⁷ Consequently, the PLCs became the most critical unit in formulating, implementing, and coordinating social control in general, and surveillance in particular. In 1995, the General Office of the CCP Central Committee issued another directive specifying the responsibilities and authority of the PLCs. Among other things, the PLCs were empowered to “organize and coordinate the work of social comprehensive management of law and order and public safety (治安).” Assignment of this broad security function to the PLCs greatly strengthened their power and role in organizing and coordinating the operations of the surveillance state.⁸ In 1999, the CCP established its infamous 610 Office to suppress the spiritual group, Falun Gong, and other cults. At the central level, this office was set up inside the CPLAC. At the local levels, it was attached to the local PLCs, thus effectively giving them a direct, albeit narrowly focused, security function.⁹

Table 1: Secretaries of the CPLAC since 1980

Year	Name	Headed the Ministry of Public Security
Jan.1980–Sept.1982	Peng Zhen (彭真)	No
Sept.1982–Sept.1985	Chen Pixian (陈丕显)	No
Sept.1985–Nov.1992	Qiao Shi (乔石)	No
Nov.1992–Mar.1998	Ren Jianxin (任建新)	No
Mar.1998–Oct.2007	Luo Gan (罗干)	No
Oct.2007–Nov.2012	Zhou Yongkang (周永康)	Yes
Nov.2012–Oct.2017	Meng Jianzhu (孟建柱)	Yes
Oct.2017–	Guo Shenkun (郭声琨)	Yes

The party formalized the direct role of the PLCs in domestic security in November 2003.¹⁰ As part of party efforts to strengthen the PLCs’ leadership in public security agencies, the party mandated that a member of the standing committee of the party committee or a deputy governor

⁷ 李永浩等, “全面推进依法治国背景下中央政法委改革探讨,” 淮阴师范学院学报 3 (2016): 301–308.

⁸ 殷家国, “基层政法委在履行职责中存在的主要问题及对策,” 贵州省政法管理干部学院学报, 1 (1996): 37–38.

⁹ Sarah Cook and Leeshai Lemish, “The 610 Office: Policing the Chinese Spirit,” *China Brief* vol. 11, no. 17 (2011), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-610-office-policing-the-chinese-spirit/>, accessed June 4, 2021.

¹⁰ “中共中央关于进一步加强和改进公安工作的决定,” <http://www.reformdata.org/2003/1118/4921.shtml>, accessed July 11, 2021.

or mayor should concurrently serve as director of the local public security agency. Since the heads of local PLCs typically sat on the local CCP standing committees, this policy made it standard practice to appoint the same person to head both the local PLCs and the PSBs. With one stroke, the party elevated the political status of the local PSBs and gave them, for the first time, a direct role in public security.¹¹

The 2000s was the period when the PLCs wielded unprecedented power and played an active role in domestic security affairs. It also coincided with the elevation of head of the CPLAC to the Politburo Standing Committee and the tenure of Luo Gan (罗干) (a hardline loyalist of former Premier Li Peng) and Zhou Yongkang (a capable but ruthless apparatchik). Both of these men served concurrently as head of the CPLAC and as a member of CCP Politburo Standing Committee. Under Luo and Zhou, the CPLAC and the local PLCs acquired more functional responsibilities to maintain “social stability” (维稳). The CCP’s November 2003 landmark document on domestic security also pledged to increase funding for domestic security. Consequently, the domestic security budget, which funds the agencies under the supervision of the CPLAC and the local PLCs, thereafter started growing rapidly.

After Xi became party chief, the political status of the CPLAC declined. Zhou was purged in 2013 and sentenced to life. His successor as the head of the Central PLC, Meng Jiangzhu, was a Politburo member, but not a member of its Standing Committee. At the local level, the practice of appointing the heads of the PLCs to lead the PSBs also was gradually phased out.¹² In November 2013, the party announced the establishment of a Central National Security Commission headed by Xi Jinping.¹³ Based on its domestically focused mandate, this new organ, in theory at least, can assume many of the domestic security responsibilities currently assigned to the CPLAC.

Xi launched his purge of the domestic security apparatus in January 2018, shortly before announcement of the reorganization of the CPLAC. In the last three and half years, the campaign has claimed several senior officials in Chinese law enforcement and local PLCs.¹⁴ Accompanying what would perhaps be the largest purge of the party’s coercive apparatus since the end of the Cultural Revolution, in January 2019 Xi also issued an important document, “CCP

¹¹ “中共中央关于进一步加强和改进公安工作的决定”; Yuhua Wang and Carl Minzner, “The Rise of the Chinese Security State,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 222 (2015): 339–359; Yuhua Wang, “Empowering the Police: How the Chinese Communist Party Manages Its Coercive Leaders,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 219 (2014): 625–648.

¹² 钟金燕, “中共政法委制度的历史考察,” 中共党史研究, no. 4 (2014): 116–124; 曾林妙 陈科霖, “中国国家治理中的政法委制度,” 国家治理评论 (April 2020): 5–15.

¹³ David M. Lampton, “Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: Policy Coordination and Political Power,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 24, no. 95 (2015): 759–777.

¹⁴ For an analysis of the purge, see Guoguang Wu, “Continuous Purges: Xi’s Control of the Public Security Apparatus and the Changing Dynamics of CCP Elite Politics,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 66 (Winter 2020), <https://www.prcleader.org/wu> accessed July 22, 2021; Sheena Chestnut Greitens, “The Saohei Campaign, Protection Umbrellas, and China’s Changing Political-Legal Apparatus,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 65 (Fall 2020), <https://www.prcleader.org/greitens-1>, accessed July 22, 2021.

Rules on Political-Legal Work” (中国共产党政法工作条例), formalizing existing practices and cementing the party’s supremacy over the political-legal sector.¹⁵

According to Chen Yixin, director of the aforementioned Leading Group on Education and Rectification of the Nation’s Political-Legal Ranks, nearly 2.7 million police officers and officials in the political-legal sector (mainly police, courts, procuratorates, and PLCs) had “participated in education and rectification” since the campaign was launched at the end of February 2021 (the campaign is scheduled to end at the end of October 2021).¹⁶ It seems that the “education and rectification” campaign has produced, at least on paper, impressive results. Chen claimed in early June 2021 that, less than four months after the start of the campaign, 12,576 police officers had turned themselves in to investigators. In addition, 27,364 officers were investigated for “violations of discipline and law” and 72,312 officers were disciplined and punished for “violations of discipline and law.”¹⁷

Organization of the CPLAC and the PLCs

Despite the large size of the coercive apparatus that the CPLAC and local PLCs must supervise, they are not large organizations. The current establishment (编制) of the CPLAC is not publicly available. Since the CPLAC had an authorized establishment of only fifty in the mid-1990s, its entire staff today may be at most a few hundred.¹⁸ Information about the local PLCs is more readily available. The case of Ji’nan’s CCP PLC illustrates both the growth in the size of a PLC and the expansion of its functional responsibilities. In 1983, Ji’nan’s PLC had only three sections – secretariat, political work (overseeing official appointments in the political-legal sector), and research. By November 1996, the Ji’nan PLC had five sections – general office, research and propaganda, supervision of law enforcement, cadres, and comprehensive management of law and order. Additional sections, such as the 610 Office and a stability-maintenance office, were added in the early 2000s. Its authorized establishment, thirty-two in 2002, grew to forty-six in 2009, an increase of more than 40 percent.¹⁹ The PLC of Yuanmo county in Yunnan in 1995 had only five people: one full-time deputy secretary, two deputy directors in charge of its two offices, one staffer, and one driver. But by 2010, it had an authorized establishment of eighteen people in six offices.²⁰

No information about the CPLAC’s internal organization can be found on its website (<https://www.chinapeace.gov.cn/>). The Wikipedia page on the CPLAC lists fourteen

¹⁵ 中共中央印发中国共产党政法工作条例, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-01/18/content_5359135.htm, accessed July 11, 2021.

¹⁶ The number 2.7 million likely does not include the People’s Armed Police because China has about 2 million uniformed police.

¹⁷ “政法队伍整顿教育, 全国 12576 名干警投案,” <https://www.infzm.com/contents/207864>, accessed July 11, 2021; “全国政法队伍教育整顿领导小组: 16 个中央督导组近期到位,” <http://news.163.com/fztd/1096.html>, accessed July 22, 2021.

¹⁸ 钟金燕, “中共政法委制度的历史考察,” 123.

¹⁹ 钟金燕, “中共政法委制度的历史考察,” 121–123.

²⁰ 元谋年鉴 1996, 109; 2011, 189.

departments. The most important ones are: general office (办公室), political department (政治部) in charge of vetting personnel for appointment and promotion, research office (研究室) that also coordinates the work of courts and procuratorates (执法监督协调室), bureau in charge of supervising law and order (社会治安综合治理督导局) and also oversees special initiatives (专项行动办公室), political security bureau (政治安全局), bureau of maintaining social stability (维护社会稳定指导局), office for directing and coordinating anti-splittism (presumably responsible for ethnic unrest) (反分裂指导协调室), bureau for coordinating work against evil cults (反邪教协调局), bureau for basic-level social management, bureau for directing the building of political-legal personnel, bureau of propaganda and education, and bureau of rule of law.²¹ Even though these departments bear names that are likely accurate, we cannot find official sources confirming their existence.

We can only make an educated guess about the major departments of the CPLAC based on the responsibilities that the party assigned the CPLAC after the massive reorganization of the party-state in March 2018.²² According to the reorganization plan, the CPLAC shares with the MPS responsibility for repressing “evil cults,” thus warranting a department focusing on “evil cults.” Another responsibility assigned to the commission is to coordinate, push, and supervise comprehensive law-and-order management (社会治安综合治理), a task also requiring a stand-alone bureau. The reorganization abolished the Central Stability Maintenance Leading Group and its Office (中央维护稳定工作领导小组及其办公室) and transferred its former responsibility to the CPLAC, which most likely entailed the establishment of a department responsible for social stability. The reference to a political security bureau is new, but given Xi’s repeated emphasis on “political security” (政治安全), it seems reasonable that a stand-alone bureau in charge of political security should be set up inside the CPLAC.²³ One clarification is needed here. The transfer of these responsibilities to the CPLAC creates the impression that the re-organization expanded the power of the CPLAC. This is not true because the offices and commissions abolished by the reorganization were located inside the CPLAC and led by the same personnel who took over after the reorganization. The reorganization merely streamlined the management structure and eliminated unnecessary shell departments.

Since the equivalent provincial and municipal committees often mirror the organizational set-up of those committees at the Party Center, we may also gain some insights into the internal organization of the CPLAC by looking at the lower-level PLCs. The PLC of Guizhou is one of the few provincial-level PLCs that makes public its internal organization, albeit not in the most

²¹ <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中共中央政法委员会>, accessed July 22, 2021.

²² “中共中央印发”深化党和国家机构改革方案,” https://web.archive.org/web/20200810200116/http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm, accessed July 12, 2021.

²³ Xi frames his concept of “comprehensive concept of national security (总体国家安全观) as people’s security as the guiding principle, political security as the essence, and economic security as the foundation. (以人民安全为宗旨，以政治安全为根本，以经济安全为基础), “习近平在中央政治局第二十六次集体学习时强调坚持系统思维构建大安全格局” http://www.mod.gov.cn/leaders/2020-12/12/content_4875340.htm, accessed July 12, 2021.

detailed way. According to its website, the Guizhou PLC has fifteen sections and offices (roughly similar to the number of offices and bureaus of the CPLAC, as described on the Wikipedia page). They include thirteen divisions: Cadres (干部处), Propaganda (宣传处), (two divisions for Supervision of Law Implementation (执法监督), four divisions for Comprehensive Management (综治), two divisions for Stability Maintenance (维稳), one division for Supervision and Investigation of Information (信息督查), and one division for prevention (预防处) as well as a division responsible for reforming members of evil cults (教转处). The PLC also has two offices: a general office (办公室) and a research office (研究室).²⁴ The responsibilities of these divisions and offices largely correspond to those of the CPLAC and can be divided into five substantive areas: management and vetting of officials in the political-legal sector (Cadres), conventional law enforcement and public safety (Comprehensive Management), regime security (Stability Maintenance), coordination of political-legal work (Supervision of Law Implementation), and suppression of evil cults.

Examination of the websites of the local PLCs and yearbooks published by local governments shows that cities and counties have wide discretion in deciding the internal organization of their PLCs. For example, Hangzhou's PLC has a general office (which also serves as a research office), a political division (in charge of personnel), a discipline inspection group, an office for supervision of law implementation, a comprehensive coordination division, a division responsible for guiding basic-level entities, an evaluation division, and a stability maintenance division.²⁵

Information from the local PLCs gives us a clearer picture of their role in domestic security as well as useful clues about the tasks assigned to the CPLAC.²⁶ We may group their responsibilities into five categories:

1. Coordinating domestic security tasks, including crackdowns on cults, dealing with mass incidents, coordinating security measures during “sensitive periods,” and identifying and surveilling key individuals (such as PLA veterans, cult members, and petitioners);
2. Screening the appointment and promotion of officials in the legal-political sector for political loyalty;
3. Overseeing the buildout of a domestic security infrastructure, both organizational (such as the grid management system) and hardware (such as the “Sharp Eye,” or 雪亮, project);
4. Coordinating the resolution and disposal of major legal cases;
5. Overseeing law and order, public safety, and campaign-style anti-crime and security drives.

²⁴ http://www.guizhou.gov.cn/ztzl/gzsczzjxxgkzl_1794/sygbmhdwczyjsjsgif/zggzswzfwyh/201609/t20160905_436885.html, accessed July 11, 2021.

²⁵ <https://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/col/col809713/index.html>, accessed July 12, 2021.

²⁶ Many local yearbooks contain brief summaries of the PLCs' accomplishments. More detailed summaries can be found in the section on PLCs in 中共邯郸年鉴 (北京: 中共党史出版社) (between 2002 and 2019).

This list shows that coordinating surveillance is only one of the functions of the local PLCs. Most of their offices or sections supervise one particular aspect of maintaining law and order and social stability. A typical local PLC in the late 2010s would have a party secretary who was assisted by two deputy secretaries. They would oversee six or seven functional offices, which might include (1) a general office to handle administrative affairs, (2) an office for comprehensive management of law and order, dealing with routine public safety and law enforcement issues, (3) an office responsible for supervising the legal system, (4) an office in charge of vetting and evaluating officials in the legal system, (5) a stability maintenance office, (6) a 610 office, and (7) a propaganda office. Some PLCs had additional offices responsible for national security, anti-terrorism, anti-narcotics, and “anti-infiltration.” Judging by the names of these offices, it seems that those in charge of overall social stability, anti-cult and “anti-infiltration” operations, and national security supervise and coordinate the work of the surveillance state.²⁷

The size and organizational chart of the PLCs vary from one jurisdiction to another. Most county or district-level PLCs in the late 2010s had an authorized establishment (编制) of twenty officials and staff assigned to six or seven sections or offices responsible for different functions. The size of the authorized establishment is probably determined by the locality’s population and financial resources. The PLC in Yuwangtai district of Kaifeng, with a population of 140,000, had a staff of only six in 2018. The PLC of Anhui’s Tianchang city, which had a population of about 600,000 in the late 2010s, had only twelve full-time officials and staffers in 2019. Beijing’s Shijingshan district, with roughly the same population, had thirteen full-time officials and staff in 2018.²⁸ A mid-sized county or district-level PLC had about two dozen officials and staff in the late 2010s. The PLC of Neihuang county in Henan, with a population of nearly 800,000 in 2018, had twenty-seven full-time officials and staff in 2018.²⁹ Beijing’s Miyun district (with a population of half a million) had a much larger PLC. Its authorized establishment in 2018 was fifty-one, with seventeen additional support staff.³⁰

Activities of the Local PLCs

Since official sources provide little information about the operations of the CPLAC, we can only rely on disclosure of the activities of the local PLCs to gain a deeper appreciation of how these committees coordinate domestic security. Due to the small size of the local PLCs (with some offices staffed by only one or two people), this institution plays no operational role in the Chinese surveillance state. Instead, its key function is to coordinate and supervise implementation of the surveillance measures assigned to law enforcement agencies, government

²⁷ For illustrative descriptions of the organization of various local PLCs, see 北京密云年鉴 2019 (Beijing: 北京出版集团北京出版社, 2019), 112; 内黄年鉴 2019 (郑州: 中原出版传媒集团 2019), 190; 维西傈僳族自治县年鉴 2019 (昆明: 云南出版集团云南科技出版社, 2019), 148; 黄龙年鉴 2015 (西安: 陕西新华出版传媒集团三秦出版社, 2015): 76.

²⁸ 开封市禹王台区年鉴 2019 (郑州: 中原出版传媒集团, 2019): 25, 66; 天长年鉴 (郑州: 中原出版传媒集团, 2020): 62; 北京石景山年鉴 2019 (北京: 中华书局, 2019), 110..

²⁹ 内黄年鉴 2019, 37, 190.

³⁰ 北京密云年鉴 2019,1, 112

bureaucracies, and community party cells. PLCs are able to exercise such coordination and supervisory authority due to their status and the political incentives influencing the local party chiefs. At the local level, the status of the PLC is second only to that of the party's organization department, which is responsible for appointment and promotion. The head of the PLC is either a member of the standing committee or a deputy secretary of the local CCP organization (who is always a member of the standing committee). In addition to their responsibility for social stability, PLCs directly supervise the courts, procuratorate, and public security bureaus, thus wielding enormous coercive power. (By giving the PLCs the power to screen the appointment and promotion of officials in the political-legal sector, the party has created a powerful instrument for these committees to gain compliance and cooperation from various "political-legal" entities.) Even more important is the alignment of the political incentives of the local party chiefs with the mission of the PLCs. As maintaining stability became one of the party's top priorities in the post-Tiananmen era, local party chiefs could ill-afford to be negligent in matters related to domestic security.

The political priority given to domestic security can be seen in the frequent appearances of the party secretary at PLC annual conferences, which serve as the principal vehicle through which the PLCs set the agenda for domestic security. The central political-legal affairs conference lasts two days and typically takes place at the end or at the beginning of a calendar year. It is attended by the principal officials responsible for security and law enforcement in the central government (including major state-owned enterprises) and heads of the provincial PLCs (via video conferencing in recent years). Befitting China's top-down system of policy implementation, provincial political-legal work conferences (usually lasting one day) are usually convened within one month thereafter and they are attended by the heads of the municipal and prefectural PLCs, which thereafter hold their respective annual work conferences to assign the domestic security tasks to the lower-level jurisdictions. Work conferences organized by county and district PLCs take place after the municipal and prefectural conferences. Based on this schedule, by the end of February of each year, the party's domestic security agenda and priority tasks are fully communicated to the county and district governments that constitute the administrative foundation of the Chinese party-state. Information from yearbooks of the various jurisdictions indicates that an annual provincial or municipal work conference has about 300 attendees and a county work conference has about 200 attendees.

The party chief signals the importance he assigns to the work of a PLC by personally attending and giving a speech at the annual conference. In the post-Tiananmen era, however, top leaders appeared to choose strategically when they would appear at a central political-legal work conference. Jiang Zemin personally attended this conference in December 1997, shortly after the beginning of his second term, most likely to show his enhanced authority over domestic security.³¹ Xi Jinping's first appearance at the CPLAC work conference was in January 2014, shortly after the arrest of Zhou Yongkang, who was head of the central PLC from 2008 to 2012. Xi's second appearance at a CPLAC work conference was in January 2019, a year after he

³¹ Luo Gan, the new secretary of the CPLAC, was only a Politburo member at that time.

launched a purge in the political-legal sector under the guise of a campaign against organized crime and its political patrons (“protective umbrellas”).³²

Local PLCs primarily serve as the party’s taskmaster in ensuring that the coercive apparatus of the state and the bureaucracy implement the party’s domestic security agenda. To be sure, the PLCs have other important functions, such as supervising the work of the courts and procuratorates, intervening in major legal disputes, and carrying out periodic anti-crime drives. The central role of the PLCs in maintaining the surveillance state is based on its capacity to organize and coordinate campaigns, implement security measures during sensitive periods, process information and intelligence collected by lower-level bureaucratic actors, and facilitate the flow of information within the local state. The party relies heavily on the PLCs for the construction of a techno-surveillance state because the PLCs oversee and coordinate the implementation and buildup of the main components, such as grid management and the “Sharp Eye” (雪亮) project.³³

The most revealing disclosure about the activities of a local PLC can be found in a log recording the work of the PLC of Futian district in Shenzhen at the end of December 2015. The activities of four of the PLC’s offices are especially worthy noting.³⁴

1. Stability-Maintenance Office:

- Coordinating among different government departments to identify and resolve major social and economic conflicts and disputes.
- Working with the municipal letters-and-visits bureau to resolve the issue of petitioners who were defrauded by Ezubao (an online fundraising platform).
- Coordinating the handling of some of Shenzhen’s PLA veterans who were planning to offer aid to victims of a landslide because it was possible such an activity could lead to cause instability.
- Coordinating the resolution of a dispute between two companies.
- Keeping an eye on a labor-management dispute between a sports center and another company.
- Monitoring food vendors upset by their losses during a food festival because of the potential for instability.
- Monitoring the aftermath of a workplace death in a shop.
- Monitoring three separate consumer and commercial disputes.

³² For an analysis of Xi’s anti-crime campaign, see Greitens, “The *Saohei* Campaign, Protection Umbrellas, and China’s Changing Political-Legal Apparatus.” 1

³³ See Minxin Pei, “Grid Management: China’s Latest Institutional Tool of Social Control,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 67 (2021), <https://www.prcleader.org/pei-grid-management?cid=55c783b3-5fee-4480-8e68-d50a6b845bd8>, accessed July 21, 2021.

³⁴ http://www.sz.gov.cn/szzf/polidistrict/futianqu1/2015/t20151229_3414929.htm, accessed December 14, 2018. The link no longer works.

- Participating in an onsite coordination meeting about the dismantling of a building.
 - Making reports to the Municipal Stability Maintenance Office about daily stability-maintenance operations.
 - Reporting on the completion of priority stability-maintenance tasks during the fourth quarter.
 - Reporting data on the work of cracking down on collective “rights defense” and petitioners in violation of the law.
2. Comprehensive Social-Management Office:
- Inspecting anti-terrorism security measures during Christmas.
 - Requiring “units” to carry out the special tasks of cracking down on crimes involved in the trafficking of wild animals.
 - Preparing a major propaganda event on traffic safety.
3. Office for Combating Illegal Activities:
- Impounding eight vehicles used in an illegal transportation business.
 - Cracking down on unlicensed buses.
4. 610 Office (Anti-Cult):
- Accompanying the head of the Shenzhen State Security Bureau on a research visit to the district.
 - Investigating two cases.
 - Issuing two “no involvement with an evil cult” certificates that are required for citizen employment.

This list shows the PLCs’ role as a taskmaster in maintaining domestic security in general, and regime security in particular. In Futian’s case, its PLC performed work aimed at preventing potentially destabilizing events and ensuring implementation of high-priority public safety tasks and also supervising operations against individuals deemed to be threats to the party. It closely monitored potentially destabilizing events, most likely through local officials and a network of informants recruited by the police and local party cells. Its intrusion into seemingly mundane civil disputes and high vigilance against potentially subversive activities (by PLA veterans in this case) illustrate the party’s sense of insecurity, if not paranoia.

Conclusion

This brief description of the organization and activities of the CPLAC and the local PLCs may help us to understand how the CCP maintains control over the coercive apparatus of the Chinese state and effectively uses such control to bolster regime security and to provide for public safety. Although the CPLAC and the local PLCs are not policy-making bodies, they perform critical roles to safeguard the CCP’s political monopoly, such as translating party decisions into specific measures to be implemented by various entities in the “political-legal” sector, coordinating the activities of these entities, safeguarding party interests in judicial proceedings, ensuring the

political loyalty of the rank and file in the “political-legal” sector, supervising implementation of the party’s domestic security agenda, and overseeing special security initiatives, such as the buildout of video-surveillance systems throughout the country and the implementation of grid management. Compared with other authoritarian or even totalitarian regimes, the CCP is unique in adopting this institutional device to strengthen its coercive capacity. No other dictatorships have a similar party-controlled bureaucracy that is solely devoted to supervising and coordinating all elements of the state’s coercive apparatus.

The only uncertainty about the future of the CPLAC and the local PLCs is the role of the newly established CCP Central National Security Commission (CNSC). At the moment, despite its emphasis on regime security, the CNSC does not play an active role in domestic security. Unlike the CPLAC, it does not have equivalent local committees to implement its policy. Because of the overlapping missions of the CNSC and the CPLAC, it is conceivable that the CPLAC may lose some of its power if the party, at some point in the future, were to decide to transfer oversight of the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of State Security to the CNSC.

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