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The Chinese Communist Party's Integration with the Chinese State

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On July 1, 2021, China celebrated the Communist Party's (CCP) centenary, linking its future trajectory to its revolutionary past. The CCP was portrayed as a confident, secure, and integral aspect and primary driver of China's achievements and development. General secretary of the CCP, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Chinese President, Xi Jinping, spoke about realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, stated the first centenary goal of becoming a moderately prosperous society had been achieved and that China was confidently moving towards the second centenary goal by 2049 of building China into a "great modern socialist country in all respects," and warned the international community that China would not be bullied.

Xi Jinping: A Man on a Mission

Ever since coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping has been a man on a mission in driving China forward, often seeming to possess a "high tolerance for risk and a sense of urgency" in achieving his ambitions.¹ In this endeavour, Jude Blanchette has stated that rather than aiming to remake the global order to one favourable to the CCP, or on the contrary, overseeing a political system that is struggling to keep its grip on power, Xi's demeanour is due to his timeline. Xi sees a "narrow window of 10 to 15 years during which Beijing can take advantage of a set of important technological and geopolitical transformations" that would enable China to overcome both internal and external challenges.² Thus, by narrowing his timeline, Xi has "instilled a sense of focus and determination in the Chinese political system."³ With this drive, therefore, China is also trying to work around the anticipated strategic developments in the region, which includes the increasing American involvement in the Indo-Pacific.

An important aspect of Xi's strategy has also been to highlight the achievements of the CCP and portray the party as the saviour of China. Failures of past leaders and periods of weakness such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution which led to millions of people dying, along with the Tiananmen Square incident being erased from party history. Enormous emphasis has been placed on rewriting Chinese history, glorifying the CCP, and subsequently ensuring this history is widely disseminated amongst the population and studied by the CCP cadres.

To ensure China is on the right course, Xi has rapidly consolidated power on a broad scale, positioning himself as the "core" of the CCP, and thereby of China. Measures taken by him have included purging the CCP of corruption (allowing him to also sideline potential challengers and install loyalists), cracking down on dissent, and increasing China's global influence. He has also sought to rectify party cells in state-owned enterprises and streamline the propaganda and decision-making apparatus of the nation. Xi has also propagated "Xi Jinping Thought" as a drive to enshrine his ideology across the country, resulting in 18 research centres, across disciplines, being established to study his

philosophy.⁴ In terms of concentrating political power, Xi has reduced the membership of the apex leadership committee of the CCP, the Politburo Standing Committee, from nine to seven, and has also appointed himself as Chair to eight of the most important policy-making commissions of the CCP (Figure 1). On the security front, these include the commissions on foreign affairs, national security, and cybersecurity and informatization. The streamlining of the commissions and Xi's leadership in them has resulted in greater centralization of China's political process.

Expanding the CCP's Reach

Despite the CCP ruling supreme in China, previous reform era leaders had sought to separate the party and the state.⁵ Subsequently, while Xi increases his own power, he is reversing this process and has successfully expanded the powers and reach of the CCP across China, driving to further integrate the two.

An important aspect of this has been the merger of central state organizations with the CCP and bringing them under existing parallel CCP departments (Figure 2). The reason for this has been to make the government more efficient and further streamline organs to better serve the CCP's agenda. Organizations with similar mandates were thus absorbed by CCP bodies to prevent duplication and subsequent inefficiency in governance. "According to official media, the reforms reassigned or abolished the responsibilities of 1.8 million posts in 31 organizations within ministries and their satellite bodies," resulting in the CCP further entrenching its monopoly on political power in China.⁶

As Figure 2 depicts, the Civil Service Department, the National Academy of Governance (which trains middle and lower levels of officials), and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television were all reorganized under CCP bodies. This, no doubt, has led to increasing party control, and an increased permeation of CCP's ideology in these departments – bringing them more in line with Xi's aims for China.

Although not depicted in Figure 2, the merger of the National Supervisory Commission, China's primary anti-corruption agency, and the CCP's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the CCP's self-supervision agency, is equally important.⁷ Subsequently, other anti-corruption departments, the "Anti-corruption Bureau, the Anti-dereliction of Duty Department, and the Corruption Prevention Department" were assimilated the National Supervisory Commission.⁸ Thus, under the leadership of the CCDI, the CCP "now exercises supervisory control over all party cadres and public personnel," including those in state-owned enterprises along with university professors.⁹

Ultimately, this is only one of the many steps taken by Xi Jinping to consolidate the influence of the CCP across all spectrums of society in China. The increasing integration of the state and party

organizations also aims to embed the CCP's domination on political power and ideology to levels unseen before. Therefore, through these measures, Xi not only increases the reach of the already all-powerful CCP but also his own power as the core of the CCP – having built a centralised, hierarchical system with him at the centre.

Looking ahead, with the 20th Party Congress approaching in 2022, these reorganizations will be crucial in what is likely to be Xi's unprecedented third term as General Secretary of the CCP, having already abolished term limits for the position of president in 2018. This consolidation of power, therefore, combined with another five years as the core of the CCP, would enable Xi to accelerate his drive towards achieving the "China Dream," resulting in strategic implications for neighbouring countries such as India, along with wider global ramifications.

English	Start date	Chair	Deputy Chair(s)	Head of Office	Comments
Finance & Economy	1980	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang	Liu He	Upgrade to a commission after 19 th Party Congress
Foreign Affairs	1981	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang	Yang Jiechi	Upgrade to a commission after 19 th Party Congress
Comprehensively Deepening Reform	2013	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang, Wang Huning, Han Zheng	Wang Huning	Upgrade to a commission after 19 th Party Congress
National Security	2013	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu	Ding Xuexiang*	Founded as commission
Cybersecurity & Informatization	2014	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang, Wang Huning	Zhuang Rongwen	Upgrade to a commission after 19 th Party Congress
Commission for Comprehensive Law-based Governance	2017	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang, Wang Huning, Li Zhanshu	Guo Shengkun	Upgrade to a commission after 19 th Party Congress
Integrated Military and Civil Development	2017	Xi Jinping	Wang Huning, Han Zheng	Han Zheng*	Founded as commission
National Audit	2018*	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang, Zhao Leji	Hu Zejun	Founded as commission

Figure 1: Commissions chaired by Xi Jinping

Source: MERICS¹⁰

State Council		Chinese Communist Party (CCP)
Ministry of Supervision (监察部)	→	Absorbed by National Supervision Commission (国家监察委员会)
Bureau of Corruption Prevention (国家预防腐败局)	→	Absorbed by National Supervision Commission (国家监察委员会)
State Office for Public Sector Reform (中央机构编制委员会)	→	Reorganized under the CCP Organization Department (中共中央组织部)
Civil Servant Department (国家公务员局)	→	Reorganized under the CCP Organization Department (中共中央组织部)
National Academy of Governance (国家行政学院)	→	Merged with the Central Party School (中央党校)
State Administration Of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (国家新闻出版广电总局)	→	Absorbed by the CCP Publicity Department (中共中央宣传部)
State Ethnic Affairs Commission (国家民族事务委员会)	→	Leadership transferred to CCP United Front Department (中共中央统一战线工作部)
State Administration for Religious Affairs (国家宗教事务局)	→	Reorganized under CCP United Front Department (中共中央统一战线工作部)
SC Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (国务院侨务办公室)	→	Reorganized under CCP United Front Department (中共中央统一战线工作部)

Figure 2: Mergers of central state organizations under the CCP

Source: MERICS¹¹

Notes

¹ Jude Blanchette, "Xi's Gamble: The Race to Consolidate Power and Stave Off Disaster," *Foreign Affairs*, June 22, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-22/xis-gamble>. Accessed 25 July 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Josephine Ma, Echo Xie, "China opens more research centres dedicated to Xi Jinping Thought," *South China Morning Post*, July 9, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3140381/china-opens-more-research-centres-dedicated-xi-jinping-thought>. Accessed 25 July 2021.

⁵ Sabine Muscat, "In Xi's China, the party morphs into the state," *MERICS*, March 7, 2018, <https://merics.org/en/analysis/xis-china-party-morphs-state>. Accessed 25 July 2021.

⁶ Nis Grünberg, Katja Drinhausen, "The Party leads on everything: China's changing governance in Xi Jinping's new era," *MERICS*, September 24, 2019. <https://merics.org/en/report/party-leads-everything>. Accessed 24 July 2021.

⁷ "Why should the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the State Supervision Commission co-sign?," *CCDI*, February 5, 2018, https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/special/zmsjd/zm19da_zm19da/201802/t20180202_163176.html. Accessed 25 July 2021.

⁸ Jinting Deng, "The National Supervision Commission: A New Anti-corruption Model in China," *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 52 (2018): 58-73.

⁹ Grünberg, Drinhausen, n. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.