Chinese National Security Committee

At the III plenum of the XVIII Central Committee of the CPC, convened in November 2013, among other things, the create of a Chinese National Security Committee was announced. Not much information is available about the new Committee, as is to be expected for such a power structure. It is known that the jurisdiction of the committee extends to all security forces, including the policy, army, military police, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The CNSC is headed by Xi Jinping personally, and Premier Li Keqiang was designated as his deputy.

The fact that the CNSC is a coordinating body of the Central Committee of the CPC to address and discuss issues of national security and reports directly to the Politburo and the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPC has allowed some experts to compare it with the National Security Council of various other countries such as the USA and Russia. But it is worth noting that despite the similar structure, the Committee is likely to have more authority and responsibility, while the activities of the Security Council are primarily of an auxiliary and advisory nature.

In fact, the tasks to be performed by the CNSC have been clearly laid out by Xi Jinping himself. The primary function of the Committee, as its name implies, is to protect national security, which in turn, in the words of the leader of the PRC, ensures political and social stability. To do this, the country's leadership will need to pay particular attention, first of all, to the fight against terrorism, extremism, and separatism. These are the three areas of activity for the CNSC according to the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Qin Gang.

The very existence of the Chinese state has always depended on two components. First - the degree to which the ruling circles provided unity and integrity of power (political security), and second - how this power nourishes relationships with the people (social security).

Problems in the social sphere are particularly painful for the PRC’s leadership due to the large population and certain national characteristics of the Chinese that manifest in noticeable impulsivity and a propensity to be socially influenced. In other words, the Chinese are quite susceptible to trends, and don't necessarily delve into the essence of an issue. Chinese collectivism plays no small part in this.

In addition to well-known problems with the environment, corruption, and employment, a no less serious factor is the stratification of society, i.e. the widening income gap between rich and poor. One of the main indicators of income inequality is the Gini coefficient, which has not been published for China in 12 years and was only declassified in 2013. According to official statistics, in 2008 the ratio peaked at 0.49. It since declined to 0.47 in 2011 and currently remains within these limits. Nevertheless, such data are not entirely consistent with other sources. The Southwest University of Finance and Economics in Chengdu conducted its own studies in 2010. According to its results, the coefficient was 0.6 at that time. Similar figures have been given by international organizations and foreign experts regarding the current situation in China. A coefficient of 0.4 is considered to be potentially dangerous and could lead to unrest and riots.
All this cannot but worry the Chinese leadership, but it is far-fetched to hope that the authorities will begin to rebuild the entire system, in order to resolve the causes of social unrest. They are more likely to engage in "putting out fires" and preventing new "fires". The CNSC was created for these reasons (hence the increased attention to the problems of terrorism, extremism, and separatism). In general, this tactic makes sense and allows more serious threats to be avoided, especially when taking into consideration the fact that any changes to the existing order are likely to lead to a loss of control over the situation. And this is absolutely unacceptable in terms of the ongoing struggle between various clans within the CPC itself.

For today's leaders of the PRC, one of the primary goals in creating the CNSC is to centralize power and strengthen their faction's position in the CPC. Without control over the security forces, which traditionally have a huge impact on the internal political life of the country, accomplishing this task would be extremely difficult.

In terms of total capabilities, the CNSC surpasses even the Political and Legal Commission of the Central Committee of the CPC, which until recently played a fundamental role in maintaining public order. The Commission oversaw the courts, prisons, and security agencies, which includes a total of approximately 1.5 million employees, which is equal to half the size of the Chinese army. Until 2012 it was headed by one of the main rivals of Xi Jinping, Zhou Yongkang, who also headed the Ministry of Public Security from 2002 to 2007. He was an ally of the disgraced functionary Bo Xilai, and is considered the instigator of the intra-party struggle against the nomination of Xi Jinping to the post of General Secretary of the CPC. All this predetermined the fate of Zhou Yongkang.

Also important is the fact that in addition to maintaining internal order, the Committee will deal with issues of foreign security. This clearly indicates that the Chinese are well aware that their internal problems often have external sources.

The CNSC speaks to the authorities' understanding that only the unity and integrity of the ruling circles of the CPC and maintaining a calm social situation in the country will be able to guarantee the security of the state. Xi Jinping himself commented on the conditions under which the new power structure of China must operate: "The tasks of the National Security Committee domestically and abroad are now more extensive than at any other time in history, the scope of security work, both in space and in time, is greater than ever before, and the problems of national security domestically and abroad are now more complex than ever before."

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