

ASIA PROGRAMME

CLEANING THE SECURITY APPARATUS BEFORE THE TWO MEETINGS

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On April 19 2020, Sun Lijun 孙力军 was put under investigation. Sun is the *mishu* of Meng Jianzhu 孟建柱, Party secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission [*zhengfa*] from 2012 to 2017, and a close ally of Politburo member Han Zheng 韩正, who is also a full member of Jiang Zemin’s 江泽民 Shanghai Gang 上海帮. His arrest, which happened only one day after 15 pro-democracy activists were arrested in Hong Kong¹, almost coincided with his return from Wuhan – as part of the Covid-19 containment steering group 中央赴湖北指导组. To this effect, it is evident that Sun’s investigation and arrest have been in motion for quite a while now.

With Sun out of play, the former public security “tsar” Zhou Yongkang 周永康 has effectively lost most of his tentacles on the public security system. That said, Sun’s arrest might not even be the most important news shaking up the public security apparatus ahead of the upcoming “Two Meetings” 两会.

CUTTING THE ROOTS

As it is customary with Cadres working for public security, State security and national Defence, Sun Lijun’s public profile is quite limited. Sun, who studied in Australia, majored in public health and urban management, a very interesting choice especially considering the current pandemic. Sun was primarily active in Shanghai, and held a number of notable posts in his career including:

- Director of the Hong Kong affairs office of the Ministry of Public Security from 2016 until his arrest;
- Deputy director of the infamous “610” unit 中央610办公室 – also known as the Central Leading Group on Preventing and Dealing with Heretical Religions 中央防范和处理邪教问题领导小组²;
- Director of the No. 26 Bureau 二十六局 – the “Anti-Cult” Bureau 反邪教局;

¹ The arrests were led by Deng Bingqiang 邓炳强 – Chris Tang, Commissioner of Police of the Hong Kong Police Force since November 2019. Deng is one of the rare few who knows the extent of Sun Lijun’s involvement in the 2019 protests.

² The group created in 1999 by Jiang Zemin to “manage” the Falungong issue. The working office and the provincial bureaus become notorious for their “hard management” style.

- Director of the No. 1 Bureau 公安部一局, also known as the internal security bureau 国内安全保卫局, from 2013 until his arrest.

The No. 1 Bureau is tasked with domestic security work, which includes intelligence gathering and most importantly, “handling [Party-related] incidents”. Even before starting his tenure as director of the No. 1 Bureau, Sun and his colleague Li Jiangzhou 李江舟, Jia Chunwang’s 贾春旺 *mishu*³, had to handle a dicey incident in March 2012. At the time, Li was head of the No. 1 Bureau.

The incident was the fatal car crash of Ling Gu’s 令谷 – Ling Jihua’s 令计划 son – in Beijing⁴. For those unfamiliar with Ling Jihua, he was once Hu Jintao’s aide, but was also a close associate of Zeng Qinghong 曾庆红 – Jiang Zemin’s right-hand man, in addition to leading his own strings of networks inside the Party and in Shanxi, like the Xishan society 西山会.

Following this incident, several subordinates of Fu Zhenghua 傅政华 – Beijing’s public security chief at the time, was taken away by the Wang Qishan -led 王岐山 anti-corruption campaign. Unsurprisingly, this incident, which happened a month after Chongqing’s public security chief Wang Lijun 王立军 – Bo Xilai’s 薄熙来 right-hand man in Chongqing and a close associate of Zhou Yongkang, Fu Zhenghua and Mang Jianzhu – sought asylum at the US embassy in Chengdu, sent a shockwave throughout the Party-State and tipped the overall factional balance that eventually led to the downfall and untangling of the networks of Ling Jihua, Zhou Yongkang and Bo Xilai’s to name but a few.

Dubbed as the “black [facial] mask” 黑口罩⁵ by the media during the Covid-19 crisis, Sun was appointed No. 1 Bureau chief after the transfer of Li Jiangzhou in March 2013. As such,

³ Jia Chunwang – National Security Minister from 1985 to 1998 and Public Security Minister from 1998 to 2002 – was a close associate of Meng Hongwei 孟宏伟; Meng was, at the time, the assistant of Jia at Ministry of Public Security. Jia’s daughter Jia Li 贾丽 is also married to Liu Lefei 刘乐飞, Liu Yunshan’s 刘云山 son. As such, Jia, just like Liu Yunshan, is considered a prominent member of the “*jiangpai*” 江派.

⁴ Ling Gu’s car crash is a defining point in the “history” of Beijing’s public security apparatus and even for the wider ministry. The incident involved not only Fu Zhenghua, Jia Chunwang – also very close to the propaganda apparatus, Geng Huichang 耿惠昌 – National Security Minister at the time, but also Zhou Yongkang – Party secretary for the Political and Legal Affairs Commission, and Meng Jianzhu, to name just them. This crash triggered multiple investigation into Ling Jihua and eventually lead to his downfall in 2014. As such, the death of Ling Gu has to be seen as a critical juncture in terms of recent factional struggles.

⁵ Interpreted by some as a sign of defiance.

Sun had to sit through the Zhou Yongkang investigation, the dismantling of regional cliques, as well as the arrest of several of his former associates from both the public security and the political and legal affairs systems. These associates included, Zhou Benshun 周本顺 – one of Zhou Yongkang’s *mishu*; Ma Jian 马建⁶, ex-deputy minister of the National Security Ministry and an associate of Zeng Qinghong, and of Song Jianguo 宋建国 – director of the public security and transport administration of Beijing and a subordinate of Ma Jian and Fu Zhenghua.

In 2016, Sun was appointed director of the Hong Kong office of the Public Security Ministry, right next to his long-time associate Li Jiangzhou, now director of the police Liaison Department of the Ministry of Public Security in the Central Hong Kong Liaison Office 公安部驻香港中联办警务联络部. To this effect, both men were in position when Xiao Jianhua 肖建华 – nicknamed the “princelings’ banker” – was “taken away” 被带走 in 2017⁷, but also to support the Hong Kong police with management and logistics needs during the 2019 Hong Kong anti-government protests. The mere presence of Sun Lijun in Hong Kong at time did raise some questions: the ministry’s “headquarters” for monitoring the “anti-extradition” protests 返送中 was – and is – located in Shenzhen. As such, why Sun needed to be in Hong Kong remains unclear and do raise questions regarding the relationship that exists between Sun and the local Hong Kong police.

After the fall of former deputy minister of Public Security Yang Huanning 杨焕宁 in 2017 – a close associate of Meng Hongwei and of the current deputy minister Du Hangwei 杜航伟 – Sun’s patron Meng Jianzhu was left with little room for further factional recruitment. Yet, Meng tempted fate with the forced promotion of Sun as deputy minister of Public Security in March 2018⁸, right under the nose of Zhao Kezhi 赵克志, an outsider to the Public Security apparatus.

⁶ Ma Jian, a national security Cadre, rather than a public security one, had close ties with Song Jianguo, but also with Fu Zhenghua 傅政华 – at time public security chief of Beijing. Ma is also considered to be part of the Jiangxi Gang 江西帮, under the patronage of Zeng Qinghong 曾庆红. Following his arrest in 2015, Ma’s close friend Zhang Yue 张越 – Party chief of the Hebei political and legal affairs commission from 2008 to 2016 – was taken down, and so too was Lin Qiang 林强 – bureau chief of the internal security for the National Security Ministry.

⁷ Li Jiangzhou was also in Hong Kong at the time of both the “709” incident 中国709维权律师大抓捕事件 – basically a crackdown on lawyers and human rights activist all across the Chinese territory, as well as during the Causeway Bay Bookstore disappearances 铜锣湾书店股东及员工失踪事件 of 2015. According to some, Sun Lijun, in charge of “domestic security” played a role in both incidents.

⁸ Only a few months before the fall of Meng Hongwei.

However, the winds had already changed after the sudden arrival of Zhao at the head of the Public Security ministry in late 2017⁹. Zhao, a leading Cadre with ties to both Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, was tasked with cleaning the ministry, as well as the Political and Legal Affairs Commission, now led by Guo Shengkun 郭声琨 – another of Zeng Qinghong’s close ally.

The arrest of Sun is, as such, framed in the more complex factional struggle between Xi and his allies and the public security apparatus, which was, until recently, still serving the interests of its previous bosses like Zhou Yongkang, Meng Jianzhu and Luo Gan 罗干 – Party secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission from 1998 to 2007, the first “610” director in 1999 and a close ally of Jiang Zemin.

POLITICAL SECURITY “SECURED”?

The fall of Sun Lijun also comes two years after the arrest of Li Yihuang 李贻煌, an associate of Meng Jianzhu from his Jiangxi tenure between 2001 and 2007. At the time, Li was the general manager of the Jiangxi Copper Group 江西铜业集团. Li was arrested in 2017 due to the “11.24 incident” 丰城电厂施工平台倒塌事故 – which involved the collapse of a construction platform at the Fengcheng power plant. Li was found guilty of not implementing the correct safety policies and was taken down.

This circling around indicates the will of Xi Jinping to dive into the Meng Jianzhu issue before the 20th Party Congress. We are referring here to some of the corruption rumors surrounding Meng Jianzhu. The main rumor is based on Meng’s possible connection to Meng Qingsheng’s 孟庆胜 alleged son named Meng Liang 孟亮¹⁰. The issue then lies with the fact that Meng Liang is a partner at Ascendent Capital Partners 上达资本, a fund that owns a 30.1 % stake in the infamous preschool education service provider RYB Education 红黄蓝教育. RYB Education, which later listed on the New York Stock Exchange, came under scrutiny when questions were asked regarding the investor profiles and after the

⁹ The price that Xi had to pay, in terms of factional compromise, must have been very high as this position – Public Security ministry – is highly sought after by rival factions.

¹⁰ Meng Liang has had a real golden career so far, even working for JP Morgan – known for hiring “princelings” 太子党 in order to get political favors in China.

sludge of closing and infectious diseases spreading through their schools across China, but specially in Shandong. Meng Jianzhu can be seen on many occasions posing with Meng Liang to support the kindergarten in Beijing. The story goes even further and would involve Luo Baoming 罗保铭 – the then Party secretary of Hainan and an ally of Ling Jihua and Jiang Zemin¹¹. Lastly, other sources are suggesting that Meng Jianzhu is either Meng Liang’s father – which would make Meng Liang Meng’s illegitimate son, or his nephew – thus making Meng Qingsheng somehow related to Meng Jianzhu.

Furthermore, the removal of someone’s *mishu* usually indicates that the factional struggles are still ongoing and that a certain individual is being targeted. In this case, it is between the old *zhengfa* system 政法系统– represented by the likes of Zhou Yongkang and Luo Gan, and Xi Jinping and his allies. As such, the appointment of Zhao Kezhi and now, the removal of Sun brings Xi one step closer to reclaiming the public security/*zhengfa* systems. As it stands, of all the deputy ministers of the ministry of Public Security, only Du Hangwei is “out of place” at the moment [Table 1].

Table 1: Public Security (2005-2020)

Period	Name	Duration	Additional Notes
Zhou Yongkang	白景富 Bai Jingfu	1991 2008	Ally of Zhou Yongkang
	刘京 Liu Jing	2001 2011	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; Director of the State Council "610" Office from 2001 to 2009
	刘金国 Liu Jinguo	2005 2015	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; Director of the State Council "610" Office from 2014 to 2015
	孟宏伟 Meng Hongwei	2004 2018	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; close to Ma Jian 马建 and arrested in 2018
	张新枫 Zhang Xinfeng	2005 2013	Ally of Zhou Yongkang
	刘德 Liu De	2005 2010	Husband of Chou Hong 仇鸿, not in a good relationship with Zhou and "died" of exhaustion in 2010

¹¹ On December 9, 2016, Meng Jianzhu, then a Politburo member, went on with Luo Baoming to “inspect” one of the schools in Hainan. Despite the webpage having been “erased”, the cached version remains available for users to see the news. Luo would go back one more time in 2017, thus leaving us to wonder if he in fact did not have vested interests in the venture. As such, it would seem that the rumors are pushing in the direction of some form of corruption linked to both Meng and Luo Baoming, yet nothing is actually substantiated.

Meng Jianzhu

杨焕宁	Yang Huanning	2008	2015	Ally of Zhou Yongkang, very close to Meng Hongwei, arrested in July 2017
李东生	Li Dongsheng	2009	2013	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; Director of the State Council "610" Office from 2009 to 2013; arrested in 2013
陈智敏	Chen Zhimin	2009	2017	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; removed following the Xinjiang paper leak
黄明	Huang Ming	2009	2018	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; Director of the State Council "610" Office from 2016 - 2018
傅政华	Fu Zhenghua	2013	2018	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; Director of the State Council "610" Office from 2015 - 2016, close to Ma Jian 马建
李伟	Li Wei	2013	2018	Ally of Zhou Yongkang
刘彦平	Liu Yanping	2013	2015	Ally of Zhou Yongkang; close to Ma Jian 马建
孟庆丰	Meng Qingfeng	2015	-	Xi's Zhejiang Clique
王小红	Wang Xiaohong	2016	-	Xi's Fujian ally
侍俊	Shi Jun	2017	2018	Ally of Zhou Yongkang (Sichuan Clique 四川系)
杜航伟	Du Hangwei	2018	-	Close associate of Yang Huanning
许甘露	Xu Ganlu	2018	-	Xi's Fujian ally
林锐	Lin Rui	2018	-	Wang Xiaohong's underling

Guo Shengkun

Zhao Kezhi

孙力 军	Sun Lijun	2018	2020	Meng Jianzhu's <i>mishu</i> , director of the No. 26 Office - the new anti-cult bureau, arrested in 2020
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**extract from Cercius Groups's database; bolted names are current deputy ministers*

As Table 1 shows, the balance has now tilted in Xi's favor, at least at the ministerial level. Yet, one has to wonder if there is more to the story of Sun Lijun, other than being Meng's *mishu* and his possible "rogue" behavior in Hong Kong.

Moreover, if we look at Sun's official resume, a rather important position – considering the actual circumstances – is missing. Sun, as a representative of the Public Security ministry, was part of the Hubei pandemic steering group established in February 2020. As such, the "interior security" chief – in charge of "handling incidents" – was sent to Wuhan to "do his job". He was actually in charge of site security and of establishing and managing communication channels between Wuhan and Beijing. As such, some have made the point that Sun might have been part of the outbreak's problems (i.e. miscommunication, semi-cover up) in the early days.

JUSTICE AT ALL COST

Strategically, the fall of Sun Lijun does make sense, especially if one wants to kill two birds with one stone: 1) removing one of Meng Jianzhu's men as part of the overall "cleaning" of the Public Security apparatus; 2) removing one more disruptive element from the Hong Kong affairs system as Sun was involved in the "management" of the Hong Kong protests.

As such, Sun's removal, which comes four days after that of Yang Jian 杨健 – deputy director of the Hong Kong Liaison Office for the Central Government and an ally of Zeng Qinghong, deals an additional blow to competing interests located in the Hong Kong affairs system. Sun's arrest also raises a plethora of questions regarding Hong Kong's public security – and especially the Wanchai police headquarters. It also seems to suggest that Sun might have been part of the communication problems plaguing the Hong Kong affairs system, which exacerbated social unrest. His removal is most likely to streamline and clarify the communication channels between Beijing and Hong Kong.

This naturally raises the question of delivering justice and on how Sun will be processed. One day after Sun's arrest, Fu Zhenghua stepped down as deputy Party secretary for the ministry, thus leaving Yuan Shuhong 袁曙宏 – deputy minister and Party secretary of the Justice ministry – in charge of Party affairs for the time being.

In addition, on the April 21st, Fu was absent from a high-profile meeting focused on the “construction of a peaceful China” 平安中国建设 under the leadership of Guo Shengkun – the current *zhengfa* Party secretary. The meeting comprised of senior Cadres including Zhou Qiang 周强 – President of the Supreme People's Court of China; Zhang Jun 张军 – Procurator General; Chen Yixin 陈一新 – Xi's ally and general secretary of the *zhengfa*; Chen Wenqing 陈文清 – minister of State Security and close to Ma Jian, Zhou Yongkang and Wang Qishan; Wang Ning 王宁 – commander of the People's Armed Police and close to Xi; Wang Renhua 王仁华 – the People's Liberation Army's *zhengfa* head; and Tang Yijun 唐一军, a close associate of Xi who performed *mishu* functions for him back in Zhejiang. Tang, of course, stands out as being the sole non-*zhengfa* member of this group.

This sudden change could also mean something else entirely. Fu is already 65 years old and has little to no chance of getting ahead under the Xi Administration. As such, it is ideal for Beijing to “retire” Fu before the upcoming “Two Meetings”. As foreseen by the April 21 meeting, Tang Yijun has been set to replace Fu Zhenghua on April 29. Now, all bets are off for Fu Zhenghua.

THE MISHU FROM ZHEJIANG: TANG YIJUN

A native of Shandong, and a proud and true member of Xi's Zhejiang Clique, Tang performed *mishu* functions for Xi during his tenure as provincial Party secretary. Tang, originally Li Zemin's 李泽民¹² *mishu*, is well acquainted with Li Qiang 李强 – Party secretary of Shanghai, Chen Min'er 陈敏儿 – Party secretary of Chongqing, and several others of the clique's members. His first “break” came in 2017, when he was sent to

¹² Li was the Zhejiang Party secretary from 1988 to 1998. Li, was Party secretary of Shenyang after Li Changcun 李长春 was transferred in 1988 as Party chief of Zhejiang. That said, factionally “weak”, Li had to retire early in order to give way to Zhang Dejiang in 1998.

Liaoning to replace Chen Qiufa 陈求发 as governor. Later on, Tang became the favorite in the race to replace Chen, who, in 2020, is already pushing 65 years of age. And since we know of Xi's fondness for his Zhejiang allies, Tang was expected to become Party secretary during the upcoming "Two Meetings". Now that he has been appointed as minister of Justice – thus rendering him less attractive for Politburo promotion in 2022, our attention tilts towards Zhao Yide 赵一德 – deputy Party secretary of Hebei.

Tang, who is now sure to become a full Central Committee member by 2022, comes to secure one more system for Xi, but more importantly, around Zhou Qiang. With the appointment of He Rong 贺荣 as deputy Party secretary of the Supreme People's Court on April 10, Zhou Qiang's days are numbered.

Now, the sudden transfer of Tang leaves us with the problem that is the Liaoning Governor position. As the Northeast is a highly contentious zone in terms of factionalism, the next Governor is likely to be appointed during the "Two Meetings".

SECURING THE CAPITAL

Only five days after Sun was arrested and four days after, Fu stepped down, Wang Xiaohong 王小洪, perhaps Xi's most trusted ally in terms of security, vacated the Beijing Public Security chief post – a position he took from Fu Zhenghua back in 2015 at Xi's request. Wang, who "secured" Xi and his family in Fuzhou (Fujian Province) back in the 1990s, had been called back to Beijing in order to secure/reassure the President in light of the factional struggle against the public security apparatus. Therefore, Wang relinquishing this position to one of his trusted underlings, Qi Yanjun 齐延军 – now also one of Beijing's deputy mayors, might imply that he has been called to a higher office, which might be the one occupied by Zhao Kezhi.

Zhao, who was almost 64 during the 19th Party Congress, was surely not selected to complete a full five-year tenure as Public Security chief. Instead, Zhao was seen as an interesting transition candidate in this rather tumultuous period. In this regard, Zhao Kezhi was likely a placeholder for Wang Xiaohong, who took over Sun Lijun's work while

he was away in Wuhan. And now that Sun has been dealt with, we could see Wang being appointed Public Security chief and even Zhao Kezhi as new *zhengfa* Party secretary.

The compromises, not to say mistakes, made by Xi in 2017, such as appointing Sun Lijun as full Central Committee member, leaving Zhou Qiang in position, leaving Han Zheng in position for example, are slowly but surely being rectified. That said, the source of these compromises, which often leads to more severe issues for Xi, are but all the same. Yet, it is unclear to what extent Xi's actual clout can allow him to "neutralize" the prince of Shanghai. ■

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