

## Gearing up for the Two Meetings: cleaning up the security apparatus

On April 19 2020, Sun Lijun was put under investigation. Sun is the *mishu* (personal secretary) of Meng Jianzhu, Party Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission [*zhengfa*] from 2012 to 2017, and a close ally of Politburo member Han Zheng, who is also a full member of Jiang Zemin's Shanghai Gang. His arrest, which happened only one day after 15 prodemocracy activists were arrested in Hong Kong, almost coincided with his return from Wuhan – as part of the Covid19 containment steering group. To this effect, it is evident that Sun's investigation and arrest has been in motion for quite a while now.

With Sun out of play, the former public security "tsar" Zhou Yongkang 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".

### 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 – also known as the Central Leading Group on Preventing and Dealing with Heretical Religions;
- Director of the No. 26 Bureau – the "Anti-Cult" Bureau;
- Director of the No. 1 Bureau, also known as the internal security bureau, 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, Jia Chunwang's *mishu* (National Security Minister from 1985 to 1998, Public Security Minister from 1998 to 2002 and a close associate of former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei), 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 – Ling Jihua's son – in Beijing. For those unfamiliar with Ling Jihua, he was once Hu Jintao's aide, but was also a close associate of Zeng Qinghong – Jiang Zemin's right-hand man, in addition to leading his own strings of networks inside the Party and in Shanxi (Xishan Society).

Following this incident, several subordinates of Fu Zhenghua – Beijing's public security chief at the time, were taken away by the Wang Qishan-led anti-corruption campaign. Unsurprisingly, this incident, which happened a month after Chongqing's public security chief Wang Lijun – Bo Xilai's 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" 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, 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 – one of Zhou Yongkang's *mishu*; Ma Jian, ex-deputy minister of the National Security Ministry and an associate of Zeng Qinghong and of Song Jianguo – 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. Naturally, both men were positioned to support the Hong Kong police with management and logistics needs during the 2019 Hong Kong anti-government protests.

After the fall of former deputy minister of Public Security Yang Huanning in 2017 – a close associate of Meng Hongwei and of current deputy minister Du Hangwei – 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 2018, right under the nose of Zhao Kezhi, an outsider to the public security apparatus.

However, the winds had already changed after the arrival of Zhao at the head of the Public Security Ministry in late 2017. 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 – 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 – 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, 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. Li was arrested in 2017 due to the “11.24 incident” – 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 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. In this case, there are corruption allegations tying Meng to RYB Education – a company offering preschool education services – and one of its shareholders, Ascendent Capital Partners, founded and headed by an individual named Meng Liang. RYB came under scrutiny once it became listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Despite being surrounded with uncertainties, the “RYB case” draws too much attention onto Meng – and his possible ties to Meng Liang, who is being suspected by some of being Meng’s son.

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 – 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.

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”.

#### 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 – 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 channel between Beijing and Hong Kong.

Lastly, let us not forget that Sun was also part of the “containment” unit on the ground working in Wuhan during the early days of the pandemic.

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. That said, one day after Sun’s arrest, Fu stepped down as deputy Party Secretary for the ministry, thus leaving Yuan Shuhong – deputy minister and Party Secretary of the Justice Ministry – in charge of Party affairs for the time being.

In addition, on the April 21<sup>st</sup>, Fu was absent from a high-profile meeting focused on the “construction of a peaceful China” under the leadership of Guo Shengkun – the current *zhengfa* Party Secretary. The meeting comprised of senior Cadres including Zhou Qiang – President of the Supreme People's Court of China; Zhang Jun – Procurator General; Chen Yixin – Xi’s ally and general secretary of the *zhengfa*; Chen Wenqing – Minister of State Security and close to Ma Jian, Zhou Yongkang and Wang Qishan; Wang Ning – commander of the People’s Armed Police and close to Xi; Wang Renhua – the People’s Liberation Army’s *zhengfa* head; and Tang Yijun, 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<sup>st</sup> meeting, Tang Yijun has been set to replace Fu Zhenghua on April 29.

### Securing the Capital

Only five days after Sun was arrested and four days after Fu stepped down, Wang Xiaohong, 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 – 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.