

Xi Jinping ‘Big Power Diplomacy’ and China’s Central National Security Commission (CNSC)

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[Abstract]

The current Chinese foreign and national security system suffers from problems of inefficiency, the lack of coordination and information sharing, and accountability of decision makers. China’s newly established Central National Security Commission (CNSC) is designed to build a strong platform to coordinate national security work and to strengthen unified leadership of national security at the central level. This article examines the CNSC’s foreign policy and institutional rationales. It argues the establishment of the CNSC must be viewed in light of China’s growing power and Xi’s aspiration to play ‘big power diplomacy’ in world affairs as well as his ambition of overall institutional reforms of foreign and national security policymaking in China.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) decided to establish a National Security Commission (国家安全委员会 NSC) during the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in November 2013. President Xi Jinping justified it by two reasons - the security challenges China is facing and the institutional deficiency in the current system. China’s national security and social stability, he argues, is challenged by the pressure from both international and domestic sources and the present Chinese security system is not good enough to meet the demands of

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ensuring national security. That is why China needs to establish a “strong platform to coordinate security work” and “to strengthen unified leadership of national security at the central level.”¹ Following the Third Plenum decision, Xi Jinping became the Chairman of this newly established commission, which was inaugurated on April 15, 2014 and officially named the Central National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会 CNSC).²

A national security commission has been under consideration in China since the late 1990s. The NSC idea could be traced back to the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. In the aftermath of the crisis and following President Jiang Zeming’s visit to the U.S. in 1997, there was rising interest in China on the idea of forming a central coordinating body for national security affairs, following the U.S. National Security Council model. Reports and proposals were made but nothing substantive occurred since then.³ The Chinese foreign and security policymaking has suffered from the lack of central coordination, inefficiency and poor crisis management. To make the system work better, arguments were made that China needs to reform the whole apparatus of foreign and security policymaking and crisis management. But during the rule of Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao, the NSC idea did not fly and the system continued to dawdle on. Why the idea was finally materialized under Xi Jinping’s leadership? Why did he want to do this at this time? Widely perceived as the Chinese version of the U.S. NSC, what are the rationale, institutional structure and function of the newly established the CNSC? Is this

¹ Xi Jinping, “Explanatory Notes for the 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform',” the State Council Information Office, http://www.china.org.cn/china/third_plenary_session/2014-01/16/content_31210122.htm (accessed on December 20, 2014).

² There are different English translations of the Chinese NSC. The official Xinhua News Agency first used “State Security Committee” in its news on the Third Plenum on November 12, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-11/12/c_132882164.htm, (accessed on December 20, 2014). On January 15, 2014 the State Council Information Office translated it as “Council of State Security” when it published the full text of the Third Plenum communique, http://www.china.org.cn/china/third_plenary_session/2014-01/15/content_31203056.htm (accessed on January 18, 2015), which was published at China.org.cn. Later on, Xinhua News Agency used a different translation --“National Security Commission”-- on January 24, 2014 to report the Polibureau’s decision on the organization of NSC, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/24/c_133071876.htm. The State Council Information Office also uses the same translation, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2015-01/23/content_34640926.htm (accessed on January 29, 2015)

³ The first proposal for establishing a national security council was made by Mr Wang Daohan (汪道涵), former mayor of Shanghai and Jiang Zeming’s adviser in 1997. There were also several feasibility study reports produced by official think tanks, the military, and university-based scholars in international affairs.

something Xi wants to use to centralize and concentrate his power in foreign and security policymaking?

This article examines the CNSC's foreign policy and institutional rationales. Many people argue that the timing and way of establishing the CNSC is attributed to Xi Jinping's leadership style and his ambition to use it to tighten his power grip.⁴ While not disputing this argument, this article would like to advance two arguments beyond this line of reasoning. First, it argues we should view the CNSC more in light of China's growing national power and Xi's aspiration to elevate Chinese foreign policy capacity to conduct 'big power diplomacy' (大国外交). Xi is a Deng Xiaoping type of leader who wants to leave his mark in history. After some years of "muddling through" in foreign affairs during the Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao years, Xi Jinping wants to go beyond Tao Guang Yang Hui (韬光养晦) and a relatively conservative international posture. As a strong and more confident leader since Deng, he has the aspiration to ascertain China as a great power in world affairs. Thus we must interpret the CNSC in the context of China's *de facto* grand strategy under Xi's leadership and how it would help Beijing to pursue 'big power diplomacy' in international affairs.

The article's second argument concerns the top-down overall architecture (顶层设计) in Xi Jinping's institutional reforms on foreign and security policymaking. China's foreign policy has problems in coordination and crisis management. To overcome the problems accumulated over years and to meet emerging security challenges, Xi is taking an issue-driven and problem-solving approach to overhaul the system and modernize the Chinese foreign and security policymaking process. Overall architectural changes were just kicked off and it will take years to complete. The reforms will take place in three domains: ideational changes, organizational changes and statutory changes. In terms of ideational changes, Xi is trying to re-conceptualize 'national security' with new concepts of 'overall diplomacy' (大外交) and 'overall security' (大安全). He is calling for an overall approach towards national security affairs (总体国家安全观). In terms of reorganizing the state foreign and security apparatus, the establishment of the CNSC is just the first step and an institutional vehicle towards a more modernized system of policymaking, decision, and crisis management. The Third Plenum started a new round of comprehensively deepening reforms. The CNSC will serve as a lever as well as a platform for reorganizing China's cumbersome national security command system and institutions. In the end all institutional reforms will have to be institutionalized and translated into substantive statutory changes to the Chinese political system.

⁴ Elizabeth Economy, "China's Imperial President: Xi Jinping Tightens His Grip," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014, pp. 80-91; Kathleen McLaughlin, "Chinese power play: Xi Jinping creates a national security council," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 13, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2013/1113/Chinese-power-play-Xi-Jinping-creates-a-national-security-council> (accessed December 19, 2014).

I. Xi Jinping's 'Big Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics'

'Big Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics' (有中国特色的大国外交) is Xi Jinping's trade mark on Chinese foreign policy, just as the label of 'Independent Foreign Policy' (独立自主的外交政策) for Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang's foreign policy and 'Peace and Development' (和平与发展) for Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Xi tries to leave his mark on China's foreign policy as well as domestic reforms. Since late 2012, he has surprised everyone by amassing tremendous political authority and public support in a very short period of time. With consolidated power base within the system, Xi could make some very tough decisions on foreign policy and domestic institution reforms in today's China. He is more confident and decisive in fighting corruption, breaking up institutional gridlocks, resisting pressure from interest groups and shaking things up in the Chinese system.

In foreign policy, Xi Jinping is more ambitious and innovative in foreign policy thinking than his predecessor Hu Jintao. He has a new vision for Chinese foreign policy and a rejuvenated role for China in world affairs. Since 2012 he has convened two important conferences on foreign affairs. The first was a conference on neighborhood diplomacy (周边外交工作座谈会) in November 2013, the first ever on neighborhood diplomacy in the PRC history. The second one was Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作会议) in November 2014, one of such conferences in ten years. From these conferences, we saw an array of new ideas and policies by Xi on how to manage China's future international relations and realize the China Dream (中国梦) of great national rejuvenation. His foreign policy calls for conducting neighborhood diplomacy based on amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness (亲诚惠容的周边外交), building a new model of major-country relations between China and the United States (中美新型大国关系), and taking a right approach to principles and interests (正确的义利观) when dealing with developing and poor countries. In response to the criticism that China has no ally in the world, he argues for partnership over alliance (结伴而不结盟). China is working hard developing a global network of partnerships. According to Foreign Minister Wang Yi, China has established 72 partnerships in different forms and at different levels with 67 countries and 5 regions or regional organizations, which cover all the major countries and regions in the world.⁵ Different from the Western alliance diplomacy, this practice helps China to expand its influence and diplomatic space in competition with other major powers.

⁵ Wang Yi, "Speech on China's Diplomacy in 2014" (2014 中国特色大国外交风生水起), December 31, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/wjb_602314/wjbz_602318/zyjhs/t1224950.shtml (accessed on January 15, 2015).

To meet the challenge from Washington's rebalancing to Asia, Xi Jinping has redirected China's foreign relations westward. Using economic statecraft, Beijing is actively cultivating economic relations of mutual benefit with countries in Eurasia and Southeast Asia. By promoting the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (一带一路), China has injected a strong impetus to its relations with these countries. The Silk Road projects are designed to boost economic ties and infrastructural interconnections between China and Eurasian and Southeast countries, and serve as an overarching architecture for China's external cooperation endeavor in the new era.⁶ To finance these projects, Beijing is actively promoting a number of new international financial infrastructures, such as the BRICS Development Bank, SCO Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Silk Road Fund.

Xi Jinping's new thinking on foreign policy reflects a changing self-identification of China in world affairs. The buzzword for Xi's new thinking is 'big power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.' Chinese leaders used to call China the 'largest developing country' and now the self-identification is changed to a 'big power in developing.' Given China's rapid rising up, the current Chinese leadership thinks China must develop a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role as a big power in world affairs. China's diplomacy must show salient Chinese features, Chinese style and Chinese confidence.⁷

The 'big power diplomacy' has two meanings: one is how to deal with other big powers such as the United States and Russia, and the other concerns China's self-identification as a big power in world affairs (大国定位). For Xi Jinping, the second meaning is more important for his notion of Chinese foreign relations. China has already become a big power -- the second largest economy in the world and a country with global influence and capabilities, and it should not shy away from the reality it is a big power. To him, China should have a big power's way of thinking (心态), sense of responsibility (担当), and manner (气度).⁸ In recent years Beijing is more

⁶ For more discussion, see John WONG and Liang Fook LYE, "Reviving the Ancient Silk Road: China's New Diplomatic Initiative," *East Asian Policy*, 6(5), (2014), pp. 5-15.

⁷ People's Daily Commentary, "Chinese Diplomacy must have its own features – An analysis of how to implement the spirit of the Central Conference on foreign affairs work" (中国外交必须具有自己的特色—论贯彻落实中央外事工作会议精神), *People's Daily*, December 1, 2014, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2014/1201/c1003-26121550.html> (accessed January 18, 2015).

⁸ Xinhua commentary, "Constructing Big Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in a Changing World" (在世界大棋局中构建中国特色大国外交), December 1, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/2014-12/01/c_1113462477.htm (accessed on January 17, 2015).

straightforward about China's big power identification, a practice different from Hu Jintao's precautionary style of diplomacy.

Xi's new foreign policy also shows his determination to defend Chinese national interests in world affairs. Speaking at the Central Conference on Work related to Foreign Affairs, Xi Jinping said that "[we] should continue to follow the independent foreign policy of peace, always base ourselves on our own strength in pursuing the development of the country and the nation, and follow our own path unswervingly. While we pursue peaceful development, we will never relinquish our legitimate rights and interests, or allow China's core interests to be undermined."⁹ These remarks are remarkably distinctive from his predecessors when it comes to the defense of national interests.

Chinese foreign policy is facing more severe challenges, internal and external, compared to the Hu Jintao years. The international security environment Xi Jinping is facing has become grim with increasing possibilities of conflict. During Hu's period (2002-2012), the international environment for China was relatively favorable. Following the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the George W. Bush Administration reversed its hard-edged policy treating China as a 'strategic competitor,' and the US 'war on terror' helped to forge a more constructive Sino-American relationship. The 2008 global financial crisis further consolidated China's position in the global economy. Now Xi finds himself facing a much more complicated foreign policy challenge. Economic ties with neighbors have not removed rising tension over contested maritime and territorial boundaries in the East and South China Seas. Obama's pivot to Asia further complicates China's regional environment, and there are even evidences of 'hard balancing' of East Asian countries against China. Many of China's neighbors appear to be hedging or balancing, and fewer still bandwagoning with China.

Also see Ting Shi and David Tweed , "Xi Outlines 'Big Country Diplomacy' Chinese Foreign Policy," Bloomberg, December 1, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-12-01/xi-says-china-will-keep-pushing-to-alter-asia-security-landscape.html> (accessed January 11, 2015); Jiang Tao, "China starts a new normal for big power diplomacy" (中国开启大国外交新常态), *China News Service*, December 16, 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/12-16/6881205.shtml> (accessed January 18 2015).

⁹ "Xi Eyes More Enabling International Environment for China's Peaceful Development," Xinhua News, November 29, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/30/c_133822694.htm (accessed January 17, 2015).

Xi Jinping's foreign policy also began to deviate from the constraint of Tao Guang Yang Hui. He is taking a more proactive approach to China's foreign relations.¹⁰ Under Tao Guang Yang Hui, Beijing tried not to confront neighboring countries on territorial disputes and emphasize on the reassurance of China's peaceful rise. But this pacifying approach seems not to be working and not attainable for Xi Jinping today. China has turned to a hardline stance on maritime and territorial disputes, with the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea and with Japan in the East China Sea. From day one in office, Xi has made it clear that China wants to maintain good neighborly relations but it cannot be at the expense of China's national interests. Xi is not shy drawing the red line for neighbors when it comes to China's national interests. Xi's great power dream requires strong maritime capabilities that enable the Chinese navy to go beyond the First Island Chain (from Okinawa to Taiwan and to the Philippines) and even the Second Island Chain (from the Ogasawara Island chain and Guam to Indonesia).¹¹

All these challenges require China to build up its 'diplomatic capability' (外交能力建设). As one Chinese foreign policy scholar argues, the diplomatic capability is not just material power or hardware, rather, it is about institutional power and 'software.' China needs to build up its ideational power in understanding the changing world, strategic planning capacity for long term policy, and institutional coordinating capability to manage big power diplomacy.¹² Compared with other big powers, China is getting stronger in 'hardware', but not quite in 'software.' There are over thirty some countries in the world having some sort of national security committees and China is the only big country without a centralized national security management system. That is why many Chinese scholars and think tanks have argued that a NSC

¹⁰ Some Chinese scholars term this approach as Fen Fa You Wei (奋发有为). The term literally means "to strive for achievement". In contrast to Deng Xiaoping's Tao Guang Yang Hui, this term emphasizes a more proactive posture in foreign policy and taking initiative to shape the external environment. For more discussion, see Shi Yinghong, "China's New Leadership: Balancing Tensions in Foreign Policy," *China & US Focus*, March 19, 2014, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/chinas-new-leadership-balancing-tensions-in-foreign-policy/> (accessed June 18, 2014).

¹¹ Christopher Johnson, et al., *Decoding China's Emerging "Great Power" Strategy in Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014), http://csis.org/files/publication/140603_Johnson_DecodingChinasEmerging_WEB.pdf (accessed December 18, 2014).

¹² Zhu Liqun (朱立群), "Changes in Diplomatic Environment and China's Diplomatic Capability Building" (外交环境变化与中国外交能力建设), *International Studies* (国际问题研究), 2, (2013), pp.102-114.

is like a ‘standardized device’ for a big power (大国标配).¹³ As China rises up, it could have more advanced weapons, but what is missing is ‘software’. It would never become a true great power if it couldn’t modernize its institutional structure for foreign and security policymaking.¹⁴

II. An Overall Approach to China’s National Security Problems

Xi Jinping’s big power diplomacy and national security strategy is based on the notion of ‘big diplomacy’ (大外交) and ‘big security’ (大安全). The CNSC’s first meeting on April 15th, 2014 was a milestone for China’s new overall national security approach. Although little details about organization and operation were revealed, Xi Jinping’s main speech at the meeting set the tone and laid out the conceptual work for China’s future national security strategy. He argued that “[we] should take an overall approach to national security, strengthen the confidence of the Chinese people in the path, theories and system of socialism with distinctive Chinese features, and ensure China’s durable peace and stability.”¹⁵ Along the line of ‘big power diplomacy,’ he stressed the need for re-conceptualizing and re-constructing national security institutions.

The “big security” concept articulated by Xi covers an array of eleven security areas, ranging from political security, homeland security, military security, economic security, cultural security and social security to information security, ecological security, resources security, and nuclear security. This definition is more inclusive and comprehensive than ever. Traditional national security is defined as the capability to maintain a country’s survival, territorial integrity and development interests through means of national power, especially through military might. In the post-Cold War era, the concept of national security has expanded in terms of ‘security of what’, ‘security for whom’, and ‘how to achieve security’.¹⁶ Achieving security through military might, economic power and diplomacy is no longer attainable after the Cold War. Security

¹³ Chen Xiaochen (陈晓晨), “NSC: a Standard for Big Power; First Step in Legalization”(国安委: 大国’标配’ 立法先行), *First Financial and Economic Daily* (第一财经日报), November 18, 2013, <http://www.yicai.com/news/2013/11/3118757.html> (accessed January 12, 2014).

¹⁴ Zhang Ji (张骥), “National Security Councils in Comparative Perspectives” (比较视野下的国家安全委员会), *Contemporary International Relations* (现代国际关系), 3, (2014), pp.22-29, and Li Yincai (李因才), “National Security Councils in International Comparison: Status, Functions, and Operation,”(国家安全委员会的国际比较: 地位、职能与运作), *Contemporary World and Socialism* (当代世界与社会主义),6, (2014), pp. 25-30.

¹⁵ Xi’s speech at the first meeting of CNSC, April 15, 2014.

¹⁶ David A. Baldwin, “Security Studies and the End of the Cold War,” *World Politics*, 48, (1995), pp. 117-41; Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Michael J. Mazarr, and Suzanne C. Nielsen, *American National Security* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

challenges today encompass a broad range of threats and most of them come from non-military sources and non-state actors.

Among the eleven security areas identified by Xi Jinping, only military security is what is considered traditional security and the rest of them all belong to non-traditional security or ‘soft security threat.’ Non-traditional security threats have risen to prominence for China in the last two decades. As Shen Dingli argues that, on one hand, China is rising up to the great power stature; but on the other, it is ever more vulnerable than before facing a far more complicated security environment. China’s economy, finance, science and technology, and resource dependence are greatly exposed to the world and hence has become increasingly vulnerable to external threats.¹⁷ China is no longer safe from terrorist threat, both internal and external. Terrorist threat in the Chinese homeland has become more prominent in recent years. As a PLA scholar argues, the issue of whether to set up a NSC has been debated for over one decade and, in the end, it was not traditional security threats, rather, non-traditional security threats that has tipped the balance. If just dealing with traditional security, China does not need to establish a new NSC and the existing system should be sufficient.¹⁸

Non-traditional security threats, especially ‘soft security threats’, matter more in China’s national security thinking. The ‘soft security threats’ are those threats to Chinese culture, cyberspace, ideology and regime security. They are becoming more pronounced in recent years. The eleven security areas are interconnected and cannot be dealt with separately. Among them, the most salient one for the Chinese leadership is probably the political security and the threat to regime security from within. A report on China’s national security situation argues that despite continued growth of Chinese national power, ‘hard security threats’ are not going away and there are more ‘soft security threats’ to the social and political stability in China.¹⁹ As Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell argue, despite its impressive growth in economic and military power, China remains a vulnerable nation surrounded by powerful rivals and potential foes. Domestic troubles

¹⁷ Shen Dingli, “Framing China’s National Security,” *China-U.S. Focus*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/framing-chinas-national-security/> (accessed April 29, 2014).

¹⁸ Gong Fangbin (公方彬), “Security Management after the establishment of the NSC” (国家安全委员会设立后的安全管理), *Study Times* (学习时报), January 13, 2014, p. 6.

¹⁹ Center for International Strategy and Security Studies, College of International Relations, ed., *National Security Blue Book – A Study Report on China’s National Security 2014* (国家安全蓝皮书: 中国国家安全研究报告 2014), Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, May 2014.

in Tibet and Xinjiang are linked with forces beyond China's borders. The CPC regime is especially vulnerable in soft power and ideology.²⁰

Political security is a coded word for regime security and ideological security. Beijing always feels the pressure of the “color revolution” from inside and outside. As the recent ‘umbrella revolution’ in Hong Kong indicates, despite the fact that Hong Kong has returned to the Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the territory’s capitalist system and high degree of autonomy allows room for external threats to penetrate into the mainland as well as Hong Kong. The soft threat from Western values and ideologies could interfere in China’s domestic affairs and undermine social stability in the mainland.²¹

The overall approach to national security with the Chinese characteristics conflates domestic security challenges with foreign sources of threats. The ‘big security’ concept gives the CNSC a comprehensive authority in deciding over all security related issues in China. With this big mandate, the CNSC is expected to design and build a more seamlessly integrated security system to address China’s all national security challenges.²²

III. Reforming the Chinese Foreign and Security Policy Institutional architecture

In studying the CNSC’s role, many people choose to focus on its membership –who’s in and who’s out—and how the commission operates. Some thought the Chinese NSC was born premature institutionally. The author would argue that although the decision came in a bit surprise and the commission is still in a nascent stage of development, we should take a progressive view of its future institutional growth and capacity building. More important, we must look at the establishment of the CNSC in the broader context of overall reforms of the Chinese institutional architecture (顶层设计) proposed by Xi Jinping and how the new round of reforms initiated by him will address the institutional capacity deficiency in the Chinese foreign and security policymaking.

The present Chinese foreign and security policymaking suffers from inefficiency, the lack of coordination and information sharing, and accountability of decision makers. These deficiencies are largely caused by the inherent contradiction in the Chinese political system. In a

²⁰ Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China’s Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 318-326.

²¹ Liu Jianfei, “An Evaluation of China’s Overall National Security Environment,” Beijing: China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) analysis, November 11, 2014, http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2014-11/14/content_7369467.htm (accessed January 8, 2015).

²² You Ji, “China’s National Security Commission: Theory, Evolution and Operations”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25(98), 2016.

nutshell, the system is built on centralized authoritarianism on one hand, and, on the other hand, it operates in ‘division of labor’ and allows some degree of pluralization. Yet how to strike a balance between centralization and pluralization is always a challenge for authoritarian regimes.

Chinese foreign policymaking is not quite a bureaucratic-driven process. During Mao’s era, all major foreign policy and national security decisions were ‘one-man’s call’ by the paramount leader. After the Cultural Revolution and entering the ‘reforms and opening up’ era, Chinese foreign policymaking was no longer dominated by the paramount leader, rather, a collective decision making process, professionalism, and some degree of pluralism were brought into the system.²³ The decision making began to show some features of what Harry Harding labels ‘consultative authoritarian’ model that brings in information and opinions from key sectors of the population while ultimate power of decision remains in the hands of the party.²⁴ But looking into the Chinese institutional structure and structural distribution of resources and authority, the ‘fragmented authoritarianism model’ developed by Kenneth Lieberthal better describes the internal dynamics and the source of institutional deficiencies.²⁵ The fragmented authoritarianism model looks into the structural allocation of authority and the behavior of officials related to policymaking process. Although the final decision authority remains at the top, the reforms process has made the authority below the top to become fragmented and disjointed. To make it more complicated, we even see a phenomenon that there are several power centers at the top of the system coordinating and bargaining in the decision making process and these power centers have their command channels and interest constituents within the system. This is what Zhao Quansheng labels ‘horizontal authoritarianism.’²⁶

Decision making power on major foreign and security policy issues today is still centralized at the top of the Party-State system, and the multi-member CPC Politburo and its Standing Committee (SCPB) has ultimate decision power over all major issues of internal and external affairs in the power structure. Decisions are made based on collective rather than

²³ A. Doak Barnett, *The Making of Foreign Policy in China: Structure and Process* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p.16.

²⁴ Harry Harding, *China's Second Revolution: Reform After Mao*(Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 200.

²⁵ Kenneth Lieberthal, “Introduction: The ‘Fragmented Authoritarianism’ Model and Its Limitations,” in Kenneth Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p.6-8.

²⁶ Zhao Quansheng, “Domestic Factors of Chinese Foreign Policy: From Vertical to Horizontal Authoritarianism,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 519(1), (1992), pp. 158-175.

individual will and wisdom, according to the so-called democratic centralism principle (民主集中制原则). There is a division of labor among the SCPB members. They each respectively are in charge of specified work areas and represent those government organizations in their work areas when coming to collective decision. Although their work areas of responsibility are divided, they are supposed to collaborate and coordinate with each other. Strategically important issues must be thoroughly deliberated and decisions should be made on the basis of consensus.

Yet consensus making at the top often suffers coordination and fragmentation problems in practice. Coordination requires communication, information sharing, and consultation among different players, stakeholders and their representatives in the PBSC. According to Hu Angang, under the current SCPB system, communication and consultation occurs between individual SCPB members, and through them coordination between different government organizations occurs, and so is inter-organization and intra-organization information sharing.²⁷ The Polibureau and SCPB meet regularly. Members express their views on specific issues on behalf of the organizations they oversee. Once a collective decision is made, all members have to act accordingly.

In practice, however, decision making authority at the top is delegated and divided into a number of so-called central leading groups (CLG, 中央领导小组), and the ‘rule by central leading groups’ (小组治国) has become a unique feature of the present CPC’s decision making practice. The rule by CLGs causes the ‘horizontal authoritarianism’ and fragmentation problem as well as the accountability problem within the system.

The central leading groups are formed according to tasks and areas of functions. They usually serve as the overall coordinator of certain sectors of government functions (口) over their respective policy spheres. Some of them are standing ones by the nature of work areas (常设性领导小组) and some are *ad hoc* ones for certain tasks (临时性领导小组).²⁸ Central leading groups are expected to perform a wide variety of tasks to lessen the workload of SCPB. They are often troubleshooters, problem-solvers, and arbitrators over issues of cross-functional and bureaucratic lines. They are decision making bodies as their members sit in PBSC or are led by SCPB members. In terms of command chain, they are directly subordinated and accountable to the Polibureau and PBSC. The rule by CLGs distributes responsibilities and delegate authority

²⁷ Hu Angang, “Collective Leadership, China's Way,” *Beijing Review*, 37, (2013), pp. 28-29.

²⁸ David Shambaugh, “China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy,” *The China Journal*, 57, (2007), pp. 25-58, and Alice Miller, “The CCP Central Committee’s Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor*, 26, (2008), <http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM26AM.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2015).

among PBSC and Polibureau members. From the CLG membership we can tell the power structure and distribution of authority within the current CPC collective leadership at the top. Since foreign and security affairs usually go cross-functional areas, the decision making authority has become fragmented, horizontally and vertically. That is why Xi Jinping wants to reform and rationalize this institutional architecture.²⁹

Foreign and Security Affairs-related Central Leading Groups

Names of Leading Groups	Leaders & Personnel
Central Leading Group for Foreign Affairs/ Central Leading Group for National Security Affairs 中央外事工作领导小组/中央国家安全领导 小组	Xi Jinping 习近平(Head) Li Yuanchao 李源潮 (Deputy Head) Yang Jiechi 杨洁篪(Director of Office)
Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs 中央对台工作领导小组	Xi Jinping 习近平(Head) Yu Zhensheng 俞正声 (Deputy Head) Zhang Zhijun 张志军(Office Director)
Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs 中央财经领导小组	Xi Jinping 习近平(Head) Li Keqiang 李克强 (Deputy Head) Liu He 刘鹤 (Office Director)
Central Coordination Group for Hong Kong & Macau Affairs 中央港澳工作协调小组	Zhang Dejiang 张德江(Head) Li Yuanchao 李源潮 (Deputy Head) Yang Jiechi 杨洁篪(Deputy Head) Wang Guangya 王光亚 (Office Director)
Central Coordination Group for Xinjiang Affairs 中央新疆工作协调小组	Yu Zhensheng 俞正声 (Head) Zhang Gaoli 张高丽(Deputy Head) Wang Zhengwei 王正伟 (Office Director)
Central Coordination Group for Tibetan Affairs 中央藏区工作协调领导小组	Yu Zhensheng 俞正声(Head) Zhang Yijiong 张裔炯 (Office Director)
Central Leading Group for Cyber-Security	Xi Jinping 习近平(Head)

²⁹ Chen Xiangyang (陈向阳), “Why China Needs NSC? Three Requirements,” (中国设立“国安会”的三个需要), *Daily of China National Defense* (中国国防报), November 19, 2013, p.1. While recognizing the need for reforming the current system, more *ad hoc* CLGs are still being formed to deal with emerging matters such as the One Belt One Road initiative and Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Integration (京津冀一体化).

and Information 中央网络安全和信息化领导小组	Li Keqiang 李克强 (Deputy Head) Liu Yunshan 刘云山 (Deputy Head) Lu Wei 鲁炜 (Office Director)
Leading Group for Promoting ‘One Belt and One Road’ Construction Work 推进“一带一路”建设工作领导小组	Zhang Gaoli 张高丽 (Head) Wang Huning 王沪宁 (Deputy Head) Wang Yang 汪洋 (Deputy Head) Yang Jing 杨晶 (Deputy Head) Yang Jiechi 杨洁篪 (Deputy Head)
Central Leading Group for Social Stability 中央维护稳定工作领导小组	Meng Jianzhu 孟建柱 (Head) Yang Hanning 杨焕宁 (Office Director)
Central Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reforms 中央全面深化改革领导小组	Xi Jinping 习近平 (Head) Li Keqiang 李克强 (Deputy Head) Liu Yunshan 刘云山 (Deputy Head) Zhang Gaoli 张高丽 (Deputy Head) Wang Huning 王沪宁 (Office Director) Mu Hong 穆虹 (Deputy Office Director)
Central Leading Group for National Defense and Military Reforms 中央深化国防和军队改革领导小组	Xi Jinping 习近平 (Head) Fan Changlong 范长龙 (Deputy Head) Xu Qiliang 许其亮 (Deputy Head)

Foreign policy and national security policy decision making requires a centralized decision authority, that is, an ultimate decision maker with undisputable power and authority to make the call and can arbitrate over different bureaucratic interests. The current Chinese system does not have such a paramount leader over foreign policy. The final decision making authority is in PBSC but power and work load is delegated to different CLGs. No single CLG has the overall authority on foreign policy and national security issues. As security issues are increasingly cross-work areas and cross-bureaucratic responsibility lines, decision power is actually diffused into different CLGs. Among these groups, their decisions need to be made on a broadly based consensus among different players and stakeholders, not confined to the responsibility of one single CLG. Yet broadly based consensus building is time consuming and requires information sharing and thorough deliberation, which sometimes prompts turf fighting. CLGs are created to increase coordination, information sharing, and decision efficiency. But they don't have adequate institutional capacity to coordinate and share information. The jurisdiction over foreign policy and security affairs fall into different CLGs and none of them could function as the central decision making body, nor could they provide coordination on a daily basis to monitor and analyze on-going foreign and national security issues, not to say they have professional capacity to do policy research and planning for a longer term strategy.

To make things worse, the present collective leadership at the top could lead to politics of oligarchy. Each PBSC member has one area of responsibility and they become the “supreme leader” in their turfs by having vertical control of the sector in the system (as Zhou Yongkang did in the Law and Politics area). As a result, division of labor under the collective leadership means no one is accountable for collective decisions. As Zheng Yongnian observes, the “collective presidency” designed by Deng Xiaoping turns out to be no president or there are several presidents in decision making. PBSC members enjoy decision power in their work areas, but if something goes wrong, nobody is accountable under the collective leadership system.³⁰

IV. China’s Foreign and Security Policy Making Process

In theory, China’s foreign and national security decision and policymaking is divided and exercised among the three statutory players – the State Council, the National People’s Congress, and the Central Military Commission. But in reality, the CPC Politbureau and PBSC play the central role leading the processes in the state bureaucracy, the legislature, and the military. As discussed above, the centralized decision and policymaking is exercised through CLGs at top of the system, and among them the Central Leading Group for Foreign Affairs (CLGFA 中央外事工作领导小组) is the most important one that exercises general oversight and final decision power over foreign affairs.

The CLGFA was created in 1958, suspended during the Cultural Revolution, and resumed in 1981. It is usually headed by the Party General Secretary and CMC Chairman, and he is assisted by a State Councilor in charge of foreign affairs, who is also the Director of the COFA. During the 1988 institutional restructuring the State Council created a Foreign Affairs Office (国务院外事办公室), but it was abolished in May 1998 and converted into the Central Office for Foreign Affairs (COFA 中央外事办公室), an office subordinating to the CPC Central Leading Group for Foreign Affairs. The CLGFA is within the Party system but it has one office and two bands (一套班子 两块牌子). The COFA has the supra-ministerial rank and plays a leading role in policy coordination and consultation within the whole Party-State system. Since 1998 COFA has become more institutionalized, less dependent on ‘informal politics’ and assisted by a small staff.³¹

³⁰ Zheng Yongnian, “Xi Jinping’s Political Roadmap,” (习近平的政治路线图), October 16, 2014, <http://news.ifeng.com/exclusive/lecture/special/zhengyongnian01/> (accessed December 18, 2014).

³¹ The COFA has three departments: secretariat and administration (秘书行政司), foreign affairs administration (外事管理司), and policy research (政策研究司). Mr Liu Huaqiu (刘华秋) was

The CLGFA is not a fully institutionalized agency with its current small staff. It does not have a regular meeting schedule or a fixed list of regular participants. Its meetings are called as needed and the participants are sometimes determined according to issue at hand. As discussed above, policy coordination occurs among PB/PBSC members as they sit in the CLGFA meeting as “principals.” Although this “informal politics” mechanism is improved by the assistance of the COFA staff but the office is small in size and short of manpower and expertise in coordinating decisions and implementations at the working level of various bureaucracies. So that limits the policy coordination only to some very critical issues that require leaders’ attention. More routine foreign affairs issues are left to the autonomy of the bureaucracy.

National security and foreign affairs issues have become more intertwined and prominent in recent years. Security affairs usually fall into the responsibility of the Central Military Commission and the Chinese military. But the changing nature of national security affairs, especially emerging non-traditional security issues, require a centralized body like the CLGFA to manage cross-boundary coordination and more prompt decision making, especially during a crisis situation. That was why the idea of creating a NSC following the U.S. model emerged and aroused new debate on decision making mechanism each time following a crisis, such as the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995-96, the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, and the EP-3 incident in 2001. The CPC Leadership established a Central Leading Group for National Security Affairs (CLGNSA 中央国家安全领导小组) in September 2000. It comprises of key government and party agency players in national security affairs. Since then, the leading group has co-existed with the CLGFA and literally became the same organization with two different titles (一个机构 两块牌子). Although it is the same organization, there may be a distribution of labor on national security and foreign policy between two different bureaus.³²

However, as China has increasingly become involved in global affairs, there are more international affairs issues and crises that need to be managed and handled in a timely fashion, on one hand. On the other hand, the Chinese political system and policymaking process has become more pluralistic. That has all increased the complexity and breadth of decision and

the first Office Director when it was converted from the State Council FAO (国务院外办) to the Central Foreign Affairs Office (中央外办). Afterwards, Mr Dai Bingguo (戴秉国) and Mr Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) have held the post, both having the rank of State Councilor for this ministerial rank unit. Yet this office plays the central organizational role in managing Chinese foreign policy and coordinating the work of various foreign affairs-related ministries, provinces, and bureaucracies in China, and its status is well above the ministerial rank.

³² Sun Yun, “Chinese National Security Decision-Making: Processes and Challenges,” Washington, DC: the Brookings Institution, CNAPS Working Paper, May 2013, date accessed <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2013/05/chinese%20national%20security%20decisionmaking%20sun/chinese%20national%20security%20decisionmaking%20sun%20aper.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2014).

policymaking and calls for better coordination, crisis management capacity, and long-term planning and research capability within the bureaucracy and policy agencies. A rising big power's growing foreign and security portfolios require better functionality of the CLGFA and its staff. But the current CLGFA and COFA have become less and less competent to handle the rising demand for a more integrated foreign and security decision and policymaking at the top level. The option is to continue enlarging the CLGFA/COFA or to build a brand new NSC with more comprehensive mandate and better institutional capacity? The answer for Xi Jinping is pretty obvious.

The Road to the Chinese National Security Commission, 1995-2015

1995-1996	The 3rd Taiwan Strait Crisis. In response to Lee Teng-hui's visit to the U.S. in June 1995 and the Taiwan election in March 1996, the PLA conducted a series of missile firing tests in the water close to Taiwan. The Clinton Administration sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the Taiwan Strait area.
1997-	The idea of establishing a Chinese national security committee was first proposed by Mr. Wang Daohan (汪道涵) to then President Jiang Zemin after the Taiwan Strait Crisis. Jiang Zemin was said to like the idea of forming a Chinese national security committee following the U.S. NSC model. Several feasibility studies and research work were carried out but not implemented due to institutional constraints.
March 1998	The Central Leading Group for Preserving Stability (中央维护稳定工作领导小组) was established. The group leader was Wei Jianxing (尉健行), deputy was Qian Qichen (钱其琛) and Luo Gan (罗干).
August 1998	The Central Foreign Affairs Office (中央外事办公室) was established to replace the former the State Council Foreign Affairs Office (国务院外事办公室). The office serves and operates under the Central Leading Group for Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作领导小组).
May 7, 1999	The NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, killing three Chinese reporters and injuring several Chinese diplomats. The incident triggered nation-wide anti-American protests in China and a diplomatic crisis between China and the United States.
September 2000	The Central Leading Group for National Security Affairs (中央国家安全工作领导小组) was established and co-exists with the Central Leading Group for Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作领导小组) within the party system. The Group is assisted by the Central Foreign Affairs Office (中央外事办公室) with the arrangement of "one office, two bands" (一套班子 两块牌子).
April 1, 2001	The EP-3 incident. A U.S. EP-3 plane collided in the mid-air with a Chinese J-8 jet fighter. When the incident occurred, the Chinese response was said slow and there were no direct communication between the two ministries.
March 2002	A public health crisis caused by the spread of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) occurred in China and put Beijing's nation-wide crisis management system under stress.

March 2003	The U.S.-led coalition war against Iraq started. Although China was not directly involved, Beijing faced the challenge of how to maintain international credibility, good relations with Arab countries, stable energy supply, and support for the international anti-terrorist campaign.
January 2007	The Chinese military conducted an anti-satellite missile test in low orbit, which was criticized by the Western governments and media for the possible militarization of the outer space, and the lack of transparency and civil-military coordination.
July 2009	A series of violent riots broke out in Ürümqi, the capital city of Xinjiang. The riots caught Beijing by surprise and left a total of 197 death and 1721 injure.
September 2012	The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute escalated when the Japanese government decided to purchase three of the disputed islands from the "private owner." Japan's decision triggered a crisis between Beijing and Tokyo over the sovereignty of the islands and Beijing felt it had to escalate its pressure on Tokyo.
December 2012	Beijing established a Leading Group for Maritime Rights and Interests (中央海洋权益工作领导小组) to deliberate and promulgate policy concerning China's maritime affairs and maritime disputes with neighbors. This new task force also coordinates various ministries and agencies in charge of marine affairs management. The office under this leading group (中央海洋权益工作领导小组办公室 or 中央海权办) handles official affairs jointly (合署办公) with the CFAO.
2011-2012	The Arab Spring broke out. A revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests, riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that caused 'color revolution' concerns within China and over its interests overseas.
March 2011	The Libya evacuation. A total of 35,860 Chinese citizens were successfully evacuated from war-torn Libya, led by a Central Emergency Command (应急指挥部) headed by Vice-Premier Zhang Dejiang.
November 2012	Xi Jinping was elected as the CPC General Secretary at the 18th Party Congress of CPC in Beijing, and later he also took over the office of the CMC Chairman (中央军委主席) from Hu Jintao.
January 28, 2013	The new Polibureau had a collective study session (政治局集体学习) on China's foreign relations and Xi Jinping outlined his new thinking for future foreign affairs.
October 24, 2013	The Central Conference on Neighborhood Diplomacy (周边外交工作座谈会) was held and chaired by Xi Jinping. This was the first ever conference convened by the CPC Central Committee on neighborhood diplomacy in the PRC history.
November 12, 2013	The CPC decided to establish a National Security Commission (国家安全委员会 NSC) and a Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (中央全面深化改革领导小组) at its 3rd Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee.
January 24, 2014	The CPC Political Bureau appointed Xi Jinping as Chairman, Li Keqiang and Zhang Dejiang as Vice-Chairman of the newly established NSC, which has two-tier membership, standing members and regular members. The Commission was

	officially named as Central National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会 CNSC).
April 15, 2014	At the inaugural meeting of the CNSC, Xi Jinping called for an overall approach to national security (总体国家安全观) and a pathway towards national security with Chinese characteristics (中国特色的国家安全道路).
April 25, 2014	The Polibureau had another collective study session on national security affairs focusing on anti-terrorism and domestic stability, with a briefing given by Mr Wang Yongqing (汪永清), the Secretary General of the Central Committee on Politics and Law (中央政法委). Xi Jinping stressed the importance of the overall approach to national security and social stability.
November 28, 2014	Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作会议) was held in Beijing, one of such conferences in ten years, to discuss the latest changes in China's foreign relations and Xi Jinping gave a keynote speech on "Big Power Diplomacy with Chinese characteristics (有中国特色的大国外交).
January 23, 2015	The Politbureau at its meeting adopted a "National Security Strategy Guideline" (《国家安全战略纲要》) and warned that China was facing unprecedented security risks and should remain on alert.

The main reason why the NSC was not materialized until 2013 was the debate over what kind of NSC it should be and how it would fit into the current power structure. Of course, the debate impinges on a more fundamental issue of who should have the ultimate power on foreign and security policy and the role of the Polibureau in the overall decision making process. As by the design and power structure, the CPC Polibureau/PBSC is at the center of decision making over all party and state affairs. When coming to making important decisions, the PB and PBSC can consider policy recommendations from various state establishments and bureaucracies. When the PB/PBSC or CLGFA meets, they can invite members from the Central Military Commission, relevant bureaucracies and designated experts to the meeting. The Party General Secretary can play a decisive role in the PB/PBSC and CLG meetings. So the General Secretary, with his statutory power as the PRC President, CMC Chairman, enjoys ultimate decision power on foreign and security issues. He can shape policy debate, build consensus and make choice over all important issues on foreign and security policy. Yet the question arises - with the CNSC, can the system work better?

V. What the CNSC can do to improve decision making and policymaking?

When addressing to the CNSC first meeting, Xi Jinping required the commission to play the role of centralizing decision making, rationalizing planning and cross-board coordination processes, being small but efficient, and focusing on key links of China's national security decision making (集中统一、科学谋划、统分结合、协调行动、精干高效、聚焦重点、抓

纲带目)。Xi is right that the problem of Chinese foreign and security policymaking lies in the overall institutional architecture and requires a cross-board overhaul, not just some patching works to the system. Without overall institutional restructuring, we cannot expect China's diplomatic institutional capacity to improve.

The CNSC is still a “work in process.” There are still many unknowns and uncertainties about how it will function. As the outside tries to make sense of the CNSC, there are two questions we need to ask about its future role. One concerns its organizational status in the system and the other is about its mission and operational mode.

Organizational Status. Little is known about the CNSC's exact composition and internal structure so far. From the little information released, we know it is or will be an extremely high-rank organization within the CPC system, not yet a state agency. On January 24, 2014 the CPC Political Bureau appointed Xi Jinping as the CNSC chairman, Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council and Zhang Dejiang, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, as its deputy heads. An organization headed by the top three leaders of the country tells its weight in the system. The CNSC has two-tier membership -- state leaders such as Vice Premiers, State Councilors, and Vice Chairmen of CMC whose work portfolios are related to foreign and national security affairs are standing members, while ministerial rank officials who have foreign and security work portfolios hold ordinary membership in the Commission. By this institutional structure, we can say the PB and its Standing members constitute the inner circle of the Commission. They can meet more frequently and decide quickly in response to crisis situation.

Another indicator for its organizational status is the rank of the CNSC General Office and who directs that office. It was reported that the current Director of CPC General Office (中共中央办公厅) Li Zhanshu (栗战书) is the CNSC General Office Director. He is a member of the CPC Polibureau and the general manager for Xi Jinping and the party apparatus. The CNSC Deputy General Office Director is Xi Jinping's long-time protégé Cai Qi (蔡奇). Mr Cai has long served in Zhejiang and Fujian Province and had a period of overlapping with Xi, when the latter worked in these provinces. Cai Qi was Deputy Governor of Zhejiang Province until he was transferred to Beijing recently to assist Xi Jinping and Li Zhanshu in setting up and managing CNSC office.

The CNSC's organizational status can also be viewed in its place in the Chinese political system. Based on the Xinhua report about its formation in January 2014, it is neither a state agency (国家机构) nor a bureaucracy (政府部门) within the State Council. If it is a state agency or a state bureaucracy, it would be “founded or instituted” (设立), not simply “established” (建立) in the public announcement. It directly answers to the CPC Polibureau and its Standing

Committee. It is within the party system responsible for decision-making, deliberation and coordination over national security work, not yet become a state agency like the Central Military Committee.

What is its relationship with the current CLGFA/CLGNSA? Another related question is – does it have substantive decision making power or just a nominal platform for coordinated policy discussion and policy planning. The answers to these questions are yet to be known. It depends on its future growth – whether it can become an expanded version of CLGFA/CLGNSA and eventually replace it with substantive decision power. It is speculated that if it grows too powerful, not just like an advisory body like the U.S. NSC, but like another Central Military Commission, it would become the fifth national establishment or power center after the CPC Central Committee, the State Council, the National People’s Congress, and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

CNSC Mission and Operation. The commission is tasked to improve national security procedures and strategies, making overall plans and coordinating major issues and major work concerning national security, building the legal system regarding state security, conducting research, resolving major national security issues, setting principles and policies, as well as implementing these strategies. Xi argued during the Third Plenum that "establishing a national security commission to strengthen the unified leadership of state security work is an urgent need."³³ So for the CNSC’s future mission and functions, we could have the following speculations.

First, the CNSC shall organize and conduct research on major national security issues and formulate a national security strategy for the country. China does not have an official national security strategy. While Beijing has been more forward coming in publishing China’s National Defense White Paper in recent years, that is just military and defense strategy, part of the national security strategy. China faces increasingly complicated national security challenges and needs an integrated national security strategy based on the notion of “big security” articulated by Xi Jinping. Thus, the CNSC’s first and foremost mission is to organize research capabilities within government agencies and think tanks across the nation to carry out strategic research, formulate long-term national security strategy and conduct security strategy planning.

Second, it shall not just be a national security consultation body (国家安全咨询机关), rather, it is likely to become a national security decision making and command structure (国家安全领导机关) in the Chinese political system. When fully developed, it will command and

³³ Xi Jinping, op cit., note 1.

coordinate Chinese national security affairs.³⁴ To lead, it needs to play the central coordinating role in decision making and implementation over different state agencies and bureaucracies. The deficiency of the current system leads to chaos and lack of coordination in handling security problems. There are misuse and misallocation of resources, confusing policy boundaries, competition for resources, bureaucratic politics, and organizational rivalry in the system. Many analysts believe that if the policy coordination is raised to the very top level through a unified platform like the CNSC, it would help to break the constraints by vertical and horizontal controls (条块分割).³⁵

Third, the CNSC shall strengthen China's crisis management capability and respond to emergency situations more swiftly. Given the current institutional structure, there are various emergency management mechanisms at different levels. China has improved crisis management as the Libyan evacuation operation shows. Yet an efficient and centralized national security crisis management agency is still missing. The CPC Polibureau Secretariat and the State Council General Emergency Office have played such a function but they lack the professional expertise and staff to do well.³⁶ Without a U.S.-style Presidential system assisted by its NSC, the Chinese system needs to build up institutional capacity at the very top level to handle foreign and national security crisis.

Fourth, it is tasked to solve other major issues in national security in addition to strategic planning and formulating national security strategy. Xi Jinping pointed at the first CNSC meeting that it shall "study and solve major issues in national security works (研究解决国家安全工作中的重大问题). These major issues could include some "bottleneck" institutional structural issues, introducing laws in the realms of military, politics, foreign policy, economics, culture, technology, information, environment, intelligence, among others. Institutional reforms articulated at the Third Plenum require the current leadership to sort out institutional structural issue concerning governance and national security management. It would be an important task for the CNSC to study and introduce laws of instituting more permanent national security agencies in the Chinese political system.

VI. Conclusions

³⁴ Li Wenliang (李文良), "How should we define the status of the Chinese national security commission?" (如何定位中国国家安全委员会), *Study Times* (学习时报), January 27, 2014, p.7.

³⁵ You Zhibin(游志斌), "Make Good Use of the CNCS's Role as a Strategic Platform," (发挥好国家安全委员会的战略平台功能), *Study Times* (学习时报), January 27, 2014, p.6.

³⁶ You Zhibin (游志斌), "Emergency management after the establishment of the CNC", (国家安全委员会设立后的应急管理), *Study Times* (学习时报), December 16, 2013, p. 6.

The current Chinese foreign and national security policymaking seems to work in a well-coordinated pattern among different agencies at the bureaucratic level and major decisions are made at the top leadership level. But the reality is much more complicated and the picture is much more murky. The policymaking process actually suffers from inefficiency, the lack of coordination and information sharing, and accountability of decision makers. These institutional deficiencies are caused by the diffusion of decision power within the CPC collective leadership, the ‘rule by central leading groups,’ and hybrid vertical controls. So the biggest challenge for Xi Jinping’s reform is how to break the constraints by hybrid vertical and horizontal controls and constraints and form a central platform with substantive decision power.

Xi Jinping’s ‘big power diplomacy’ and aspiration for China’s great power status in world affairs have prompted his reform desire. He is taking an issue-driven and problem-solving approach to overhaul the system and modernize the Chinese foreign and security policymaking process. The establishment of the CNSC is expected to serve as a lever as well as a platform for reorganizing China’s national security command system and institutions. But whether Xi Jinping could achieve his ambitious goals needs to be seen in years to come.