

The *Saohei* Campaign, Protection Umbrellas, and China's Changing Political-Legal Apparatus

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In January 2018 China began a three-year campaign, known as the *saohei* campaign, to crack down on “underworld forces.” A key emphasis of the campaign was its targeting of “protection umbrellas,” an effort to break the links between criminal organizations and their government and party protectors at the local levels. In the rhetoric of the campaign, “black and evil” underworld forces not only threatened the safety and finances of ordinary citizens but also infiltrated and weakened political authority, thereby damaging both social stability and the party’s ruling foundation. *Saohei*, therefore, is not only a cleansing of corruption at the grassroots levels but also a purification and re-strengthening of governance under party supervision. The campaign has resulted in the removal of a large number of personnel throughout the political-legal system, moving from initial removal of key leaders to lower levels of the system as the campaign has continued to unfold. It has also allowed local authorities to use the idea of “black and evil” to target specific local groups, from housing-demolition protestors to alleged “underworld forces linked to the Dalai Lama clique.” The *saohei* campaign will end early next year, but many of its key themes and foci will continue in the 2021 “education and rectification campaign” announced by Chen Yixin for the entire political-legal apparatus, suggesting that the party leadership perceives unfinished work within the political-legal apparatus. Xi Jinping, having already successfully replaced most of the leadership in the political-legal apparatus, now appears to be using *saohei* and its successor rectification campaign to push his authority down to lower levels of the political-legal system.

On 24 January 2018, China began a three-year campaign to crack down on “underworld forces” that were facilitating corruption, known as the Special Campaign to Crack Down on Underworld Forces (扫黑除恶专项斗争, *saohei chu'e zhuanxiang douzheng*, or *saohei* for short).¹ The announcement by the Central Committee and the State Council called the campaign a “major decision made by the CCP Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core,” and framed it as integral to social stability and the consolidation of grassroots government. Echoing other themes in Xi Jinping’s approach to the long-term maintenance of social stability, the announcement argued that the campaign is an attempt to deal with root causes rather than merely treating symptoms, and a way to strike at problems when they are early and small (打早打小, *dazao daxiao*) – i.e., before they escalate.

Unlike other campaigns, however, this campaign aimed not only at using law enforcement to crack down externally on organized criminal groups and networks in China. Equally important is the campaign’s role in purging the influence of those groups within the law-enforcement apparatus; gangsters do not only threaten the safety and finances of ordinary citizens but also infiltrate political authority and threaten both social stability and the regime’s political security.² A central feature of the campaign is its targeting of “protection umbrellas” (*baohusan*, 保护伞): officials who provide the shelter of law enforcement and legal cover to

organized crime and thereby tolerate and facilitate (and usually profit from) their activities. The launch of the campaign portrayed crime and corruption as deeply intertwined, and it directed officials to embed cadre supervision and party discipline deeply into the work of law enforcement and crime-fighting. In a videoconference announcement of the campaign, Guo Shengkun (郭声琨), head of the Central Political and Legal Commission (CPLC, 中央政法委, *zhongyang zhengfawei*), emphasized the importance of the campaign and directed listeners to incorporate the anti-corruption campaign into the heart of the anti-crime campaign.³ A National *Saohei* Office (全国扫黑办, *quanguo saohuiban*), led by Chen Yixin (陈一新, secretary-general/秘书长 of the CPLC), was established to coordinate the effort.

Understanding “Protection Umbrellas”

The idea of “protection umbrellas” is integral to the definition of the *saohei* campaign.⁴ As one recent Xinhua article describes, the shift from “striking” (打, *da*) to “sweeping away” (扫, *sao*) evil forces reflects major changes in the context of anti-corruption investigations over the course of the past decade.⁵ Evil or underworld forces are now more deeply concealed and are operating more covertly, using the cloak of legality rather than open violence to achieve their ends and shifting the industries in which they primarily operate.⁶ The discursive shift from strike to sweep, then, indicates a change both in the definition of the problem and in the approach used to attack it: *saohei* involves broader coordination between party and state organs and a correspondingly broader governmental approach involving almost thirty departments (rather than the dozen or so departments involved in the previous campaigns).

But *saohei* involves more than broadening interagency and party-state cooperation in fighting crime. It also has been explicitly framed as an effort to consolidate the party’s ruling foundation and to maintain long-term peace and stability (夯实党的执政根基... 维护国家长治久安, *hangshi dang de zhizheng genji...weihu guojia changzhijiu’an*). The obstacle to these objectives – the one that requires sweeping away – is grassroots corruption, wherein evil forces form cliques with local officials; wine, dine, and bribe them; and benefit from their shelter and protection to continue operating without punishment under the law.⁷ As party rhetoric frames it, weak officials collude with criminal elements to obtain material benefits, while others avoid aggressive crackdowns for fear that they will jeopardize their image, harm their careers, and damage the local investment environment.⁸ The key idea behind the effort to eliminate “protection umbrellas” is that the party-state must investigate and break the links between criminal organizations and any protectors at the local levels of governance: these protectors are concentrated in, though not exclusively located inside, the political-legal system. News coverage has suggested that in criminal cases the authorities must look for both criminal elements and “protection umbrellas,” and they should investigate both.⁹ The cleansing of corruption at the grassroots level, therefore, is not only a crackdown on crime but also a purification and re-strengthening of governance at the grassroots level – under, of course, the leadership and direction of the CCP.

An April 2019 article from Xi’an outlines fifteen different sub-types of “protection umbrellas.”¹⁰ Offenses that fall under this category include: creating a company to share profits with criminal forces; using one’s position to provide time and space for criminal activities; illegally using law-enforcement resources to support criminal activities; retaliating against whistleblowers; failing to pursue a case; leaking details about a case to help criminals evade punishment; filing cases involving organized crime as “ordinary cases” to hide the

involvement or organized crime; fabricating or destroying evidence; insufficiently pursuing recovery of illicit gains; dereliction of duty in supervising criminal suspects; accepting property (including food) from criminals or their families while they are under investigation or under law-enforcement supervision; illegally commuting a sentence (for example, through medical parole); improperly interceding in the progress of a case; obstructing the investigation and handling of a case (for example, by convincing others to give false testimony); and other acts of corruption that simply render law enforcement ineffective in the efforts to combat organized crime.

The Course of the Campaign

On 24 January 2018, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council issued the “Notice Regarding the Launch of the Special Campaign to Sweep Away Black and Eliminate Evil.”¹¹ The purpose of the campaign was to integrate two objectives “sweeping away black and eliminating evil” and “opposing corruption and graft at the grassroots level.” The announcement also focused on the need to eliminate the “protection umbrellas” of criminal organizations to eradicate the soil in which criminal offenses could flourish.

The late January announcement was followed on 5 February by regulations issued by the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Justice.¹² Calling the evil forces a “malignant tumor” (毒瘤, *duliu*) on the healthy development of the economy and society, the regulations allowed for voluntary confessions prior to March 1 in order to receive lighter punishments as well as promising lighter punishments to those who assist in investigating others. It also called on the masses to report crimes and protection umbrellas, promising to protect their personal information and safety, offering unspecified rewards, and setting up a reporting website, mailbox, and phone line.¹³ By the end of the year, over twenty departments, particularly those with authority over key industries (for example, the Ministry of Natural Resources), had established their own issue-specific guidance for the crackdown.¹⁴

By summer, the basic organizational architecture for the campaign had been established at the national level. In May 2018, the office of the National Leading Small Group for the *Saohei* Campaign was established, headed by Guo Shengkun (全国扫黑除恶专项斗争领导小组组长, *quanguo saohai chu'e zhuanxiang douzheng lingdao xiaozu zuzhang*).¹⁵ Guo's deputies included Zhao Kezhi (minister of Public Security); Zhou Qiang (chief of the Supreme People's Court); Zhang Jun (chief prosecutor); Li Shulei (deputy secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection [CCDI]); Qi Yu (deputy minister of the Central Organization Department); and Chen Yixin (secretary-general of the CPLC). The Leading Small Group's Office is headed by Chen Yixin, with six deputies: three deputy secretaries-general from the CPLC (Chen Xunqiu, Bai Shaokang, and Lei Dongsheng); Supreme People's Court Vice President (副院长, *fuyuanzhang*) Jiang Wei; Supreme People's Procuratorate Deputy Member (最高检检委会副部级专职委员, *zuigaojian jianweihui fubuji zhuanzhi weiyuan*) Chen Guoqing; and Deputy Minister of Public Security Li Wei.

In June, the Office met and announced plans to form ten supervision teams, totaling 335 people, who would rotate through the provinces in three rounds (each round including a number of provinces, regions, or municipalities) between July 2018 and July 2019. The first round included Hebei, Shanxi, Liaoning, Fujian, Shandong, Henan, Hubei, Guangdong, Chongqing, and Sichuan.¹⁶ According to this work plan, the first year would be centered on containment

and combat; the second year would focus on digging into the roots of the problem; and the third year would emphasize long-term management.

A report on this first round in the *Legal Daily* recited the usual impressive-sounding statistics: the supervision teams went “deep into the grassroots” by visiting 823 villages in 627 townships and 390 counties in 99 cities and speaking directly with 5,764 party members; this process claimed to have uncovered over 6,000 important tips/clues (重要线索, *zhongyao xiansuo*), facilitated elimination of 96 criminal organizations, and investigated 1,791 corruption and protection umbrella cases. It also credited mass mobilization for some of the campaign’s initial success: citizens submitted over 300,000 reports (and received over 15 million RMB in reward money for doing so).¹⁷ The interagency offer of voluntary confession and surrender also appears to have been effective; an alleged 180,000 suspects turned themselves in “due to fear of the powerful offensive” (强大攻势, *qiangda gongshi*).

In mid-August 2018, Chen Yixin presided over the second meeting of directors of the National *Saohei* Office.¹⁸ He used the meeting to indicate the campaign had, after some initial results, entered a deepening phase in which the work would become more difficult; he then outlined ten problems to confront moving forward. These ranged from insufficient prioritization of and focus on the campaign among local officials and insufficient mobilization of the masses to engage in reporting inconsistencies across law-enforcement institutions and insufficient investigation and supervision of cases. He also indicated that a remaining problem was the entrenchment of protection umbrellas due to an inability and unwillingness to investigate, and a fear that “shedding light on the black” (灯下黑, *deng xia hei*) would damage the officials’ careers.

In addition to exhorting listeners to “dare to cut the knife inward and scrape the bone” (敢于刀口向内、敢于刮骨疗伤, *ganyu daokou xiangnei, ganyu guagu liaoshang*),¹⁹ Chen called for strengthening cooperation between the political-legal organs and their CCDI counterparts (纪委监委, *jiweijianwei*) to ensure that “sweeping black” and “opening the umbrella” (打伞, *dasan*) would be carried out simultaneously.²⁰ Chen also proposed implementation of an exchange mechanism between county-level Public Security Bureau directors (县级公安局长, *xianji gong'an juzhang*) and police station chiefs (派出所长, *paichusuo zhang*) and ordered regular rotation of personnel, presumably to avoid the coalescence of protective cliques.

In mid-October 2018, a National Conference to Promote the *Saohei* Campaign was held in Wuhan.²¹ The meeting announced that investigation of “protection umbrellas” would be one of the main foci of the campaign’s upcoming work. Media coverage in late 2018 illustrated the importance of the issue by profiling a Shanxi gang whose leader, Chen Hongzhi, had been protected by a village head (村主任, *cunzhuren*), village party secretary (村支部书记, *cun zhibu shuji*), and police station chief (派出所原所长, *paichusuo yuansozhang*); when the group was arrested, the seized assets totaled an alleged 7.8 billion RMB.²²

The second round of the campaign began in April 2019, after training sessions were held in Beijing in March. This round targeted Tianjin, Jilin, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangxi, Hainan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Xinjiang (including the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps).²³ In late May and early June, the third round began, covering Beijing, Shanxi, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Qinghai, and Gansu, followed by Tibet and Ningxia; reporting at the time noted that the supervisory efforts had then covered all of China’s provincial-level units.²⁴

Each round of supervision in a provincial-level unit has been followed by at least one round of a shorter or “look back” review (回头看, *huitoukan*), which lasts approximately ten days.²⁵ In these reviews, the supervision group examines the list of problems uncovered during the first visit and the suggestions made to remedy those problems, and then compares them to current practices and results to check how thoroughly the directives have been implemented. Review of the first round of supervision was completed in spring 2019, and the second and third tranches of review, comprising 21 provincial-level units, were completed over the course of the summer and fall of 2019. In covering the launch of the second and third review rounds (in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on 14 October), the National Saohei Office reported that these reviews were a key link in the implementation of “rectification” (整改, *zhenggai*), laying the groundwork for the transition to a broader rectification campaign that would be announced in summer 2020 (see below).

Reports on these visits typically include at least one anecdote about the negative impact of evil forces that “oppress the people” (for example, a report on Harbin refers to evil forces bullying the people for a long time: 长期欺压百姓, *changqi qiya baixing*)²⁶ – positioning the supervision campaign as liberating the people based on the desire of the masses. On 28 May 2019, the National Saohei Office held a press conference to release a new intelligent reporting platform (智能化举报平台, *zhinenghua jubao pingtai*) that allowed citizens to report on a website, via QR code or via Wechat.²⁷

The Office’s indication that it would use cloud computing and big data analysis in its work, and comments that the upgrade (from the previous letter-and-phone reporting system) would establish an integrated and efficient intelligent reporting platform and parallel leadership rhetoric about the importance of technology and data integration throughout the political-legal system. Official rhetoric around this time also began to refer to the “sharp sword” (利剑, *lijian*) of supervision, implicitly elevating it alongside the gun (a metaphor for the armed forces) and the knife (used to refer to the domestic security forces).

On 9 April 2020, the Ministry of Public Security launched a “Reducing to Zero” (清零, *qingling*) operation for the *saohei* campaign to pursue fugitives.²⁸ By mid-May, authorities reported that 934 of 1,481 domestic fugitives had been apprehended as well as 33 who had fled overseas. Little additional information is currently available about from which country these individuals were returned or how their return was effectuated.

Assessing the Impact of the *Saohei* Campaign

One major result of the campaign has been significant purging and removal of lower-level personnel within the political-legal apparatus. Media reports suggest that at least 67,190 law-enforcement officials have been investigated and prosecuted for serving as protection umbrellas.²⁹ As Ling Li has noted, this approach to corruption within the political-legal system during Xi Jinping’s first term (2012–2017) produced a paradigm change in the party’s disciplinary regime, marrying ideological and disciplinary campaigns to render anti-corruption into a simultaneous tool of power consolidation for Xi Jinping.³⁰

The work report of the SPP (最高人民法院, *zuigao renmin jianchayuan*), released in March 2019, provides a snapshot of the results during the first year of the *saohei* campaign.³¹ It notes

that some of the work involved issuing notices and formulating guidance as well as defining eleven major points of attack for the campaign (打击重点, *daji zhongdian*) and listing sixty-nine “major gang-related cases” (重大涉黑案件, *zhongda shehei anjian*) for supervision. Arrests were authorized for 11,183 people on suspicion of gang-related crimes (涉黑犯罪, *shehei fanzui*), of whom 10,361 were prosecuted, and of the 62,202 people suspected of crimes (涉恶犯罪, *she'e fanzui*), 50,827 were prosecuted.³² The report also notes that the “ruthless crackdown” on the ‘protection umbrellas’ over black and evil forces resulted in the prosecution of 350 people.

To accomplish this, the National Office had to portray both a severe problem and success in rooting out the problem. Interim reports from the first year of the campaign offer four main categories of metrics to gauge success: investigations into gang-related criminal activity; investigations into other criminal suspects; “protection umbrella” investigations; and the amount of assets involved. One review in August 2018, for example, rattled these figures off in a range of provinces to demonstrate the campaign’s efficacy:

During the supervision period, Guizhou produced new investigations/prosecutions (侦办) of 20 gang-involved criminal organizations (涉黑犯罪组织); 45 criminal groups (恶势力犯罪集团和团伙); and 731 arrests of criminal suspects (犯罪嫌疑人). Gansu investigated and prosecuted 7 gangs and 56 criminal groups...Jiangxi destroyed 82 gangs and criminal organizations. The number of criminal gangs destroyed, suspects detained, and “protection umbrella” cases handled in Shanghai was 1.54, 1.37, and 1.87 times the numbers before the start of the campaign. Heilongjiang destroyed 46 criminal gangs and seized/froze 2.17 billion RMB of assets – 7.8 times the monthly average since the start of the campaign.³³

The non-comparability of the statistics offered across different provincial-level units raises the obvious possibility that these figures are selected to demonstrate the campaign’s success and the importance of its work.

The 2020 SPP report, which was released on 25 May 2020, shows an increase in prosecutions for “protection umbrella” activity during the campaign’s second year.³⁴ It reports 30,547 prosecutions for gang-related activities; 67,689 prosecutions for criminal activity; and 1,385 prosecutions for involvement in protection umbrellas. Zhao Leji’s January 2020 report to the CCDI, however, suggests potentially broader impacts when the party’s disciplinary procedures are included in the tally.³⁵ A total of 38,000 cases involving crime, corruption, and protection umbrella issues were filed nationwide; 32,000 party disciplinary and government sanctions were imposed; and the cases of over 4,900 suspects were transferred to prosecutors.

The report emphasizes the importance of continued struggle against corruption, describing it as “the biggest threat facing the party” (腐败是我们党面临的巨大威胁, *fubai shi women dang mianlin de zuida weixie*). Overall, the national discipline and supervision organs (全国纪检监察机关, *quanguo jijian jiancha jiguan*) filed and investigated 619,000 cases; gave 587,000 party discipline and government sanctions; and transferred 21,000 suspected criminals to prosecutors (检察机关, *jiancha jiguan*); the CCDI/National Supervision Commission (NSC) filed for review and investigation 45 centrally supervised (中管干部, *zhongguan ganbu*) cadres. Nationally, 10,357 people voluntarily turned themselves in, including 5 centrally supervised cadres and 119 provincially supervised cadres (省管干部, *shengguan ganbu*).

The report also mentions efforts to strengthen international cooperation on anti-corruption efforts, including a “Clean Belt and Road” summit and other efforts. It notes that the “Skynet 2019” operation (天网 2019 行动, *tianwang 2019 xingdong*) had resulted in the repatriation of over 2,000 expatriates, including 40 people who were Interpol “red notices” (红通人员, *hongtong renyuan*) and 860 who were party members or government officials, and recovered 5.4 billion RMB in stolen assets. The work plan for 2020 indicates that the operation will continue into the *saohei* campaign’s final year.

Full data are not yet available for the campaign’s third year (2020). A CCDI report released for the first six months of 2020, however, gives the sense that the campaign has expanded even further.³⁶ It claims to have received 1.431 million letters and visits, handled 807,000 tips/clues, and filed 286,000 cases. A total of 240,000 individuals were sanctioned, the majority (208,000, or about 87 percent) via party discipline. Of those punished, 13 were provincial- and ministerial-level cadres; 1,314 department/bureau-level cadres; 9,000 county/department cadres; 33,000 township/department cadres; 39,000 general cadres; and 159,000 other personnel.

The campaign has had other important political effects. In several cases profiled in the media, the Central Supervision Group’s (中央督导组, *zhongyang dudaozu*) oversight and supervision work has prompted provincial and local authorities to re-do cases that the central authorities deemed were previously improperly handled. In Shaanxi, for example, provincial authorities re-indicted three cases allegedly involving triad activity that the prosecutor had previously declined to pursue; the re-investigation of a case in Yunnan increased the number of “public officials and important persons” involved to a total of 20; the Central Steering Group’s involvement doubled the assets in a Ningxia case, involving 7 department-level cadres, and broke open the first “protection umbrella” case in Qinghai, with over 100 million RMB in seized assets.³⁷ Reporting on these incidents seems designed not only to show the overall effectiveness of the campaign but the particular importance of central supervision and intervention in local proceedings.³⁸ While Chinese scholarship on the campaign is generally favorable in its evaluations,³⁹ one English-language article describes more mixed results: while it may improve legitimacy among local populations by tackling local corruption, it also distorts the criminal justice system in its demands for speed and may also produce distortions in terms of who is targeted.⁴⁰

Another important impact of the campaign has been to empower local authorities to interpret the campaign directive as license for broadened definitions of so-called “black and evil” forces, in ways that suit their particular interests. In a number of cases, authorities have targeted organizers of anti-demolition protests in local contention over housing and development policies or organizers who facilitate petition movements.⁴¹ Local authorities in Tibet call on the masses to report “underworld forces connected to the Dalai Lama... who promote separatist activity,”⁴² while in Xinjiang, descriptions of underworld forces include criminal gangs that operate under “ethnic or religious banners” to promote extremism.⁴³ The campaign in Yunnan has integrated its *saohei* campaign efforts with anti-smuggling, anti-drug, and counter-terrorism activity.⁴⁴ Other critics have charged that the campaign is being used to suppress religious life.⁴⁵ Perhaps as a result, officials from the CCDI warned in spring 2019 of the need to define the campaign’s targets precisely – suggesting that they had been rather indiscriminately applied to date.⁴⁶

Summer 2020: From *Saohei* to Rectification

In July 2020, Chen Yixin made a speech announcing a new “education and rectification” (教育整顿, *jiaoyu zhengdun*) campaign within the political-legal apparatus, which would begin nationally in 2021, picking up where the *saohei* campaign is scheduled to leave off.⁴⁷ The campaign will begin with a three-month pilot in five cities and four counties (as well as two prisons) from July to October of 2020. The national campaign will then launch nationally in early 2021 and finish in the first quarter of 2022. Chen’s announcement called on the political-legal apparatus to focus on four tasks (四项任务, *si xiang renwu*), the first of which he described as follows:

First is to eliminate bad apples (清除害群之马, *qingchu haiqunzhima*); investigate two-faced people (两面人, *liangmianren*) who are disloyal and dishonest with the party; thoroughly investigate the protection umbrellas of evil forces; deeply investigate law enforcement and judicial corruption; and investigate corruption that has not been curbed or stopped since the 18th Party Congress.⁴⁸

The other tasks focus on constructing a system to improve the supervision and management of law enforcement and judicial organs; promote the spirit of heroes and models and encourage law-enforcement officials in their duties; and improve the ability and quality of these officials to conduct their duties in the new era, including educating them on the differences between “passive and active investigation.” It suggests that police and other figures in the political-legal apparatus will be prompted to engage in both criticism and self-criticism in order to “mobilize law-enforcement officials to truthfully explain their own violations of discipline and law” with “proactive confessions and sincere regret.” It also indicates that the supervision teams will attempt to follow through on enforcement and implementation in the campaign within set time frames, to ensure that the work has been done as they desire.

The new rectification campaign repeats some similar themes from other signature domestic security initiatives previously conducted by Xi Jinping. First is the continued focus on eliminating “protection umbrellas” within law enforcement. Second, there is the use of the *tifa* (提法) “scraping poison off the bone” (刮骨疗毒, *guagu liaodu*), a formulation used in 2016 to describe efforts to purge the corrupting influence of Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, former vice chairmen of the Central Military Commission who were both purged in the early years of Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign within the military, but has also been employed at times in *saohei* rhetoric.⁴⁹ Finally, the new campaign employs the metaphor of removing “tumors” from the political-legal system (政法系统, *zhengfa xitong*), an analogy that has been used extensively to describe the party’s domestic security and re-education efforts in Xinjiang. The education and rectification movement, therefore, appears to be an extension, both in time and scope, of some of the key themes and foci of the *saohei* campaign. This suggests that perhaps the party leadership, particularly its disciplinary personnel, perceive unfinished work within the political-legal apparatus.

A campaign that encompasses the entire political-legal system is rare, meaning that there has not been another one quite like this during the post-Mao era. Ling Li argues that the last campaign with a similar focus directed by the top leadership was the judicial reform campaign in the early 1950s that aimed at eradicating KMT influence; she interprets this to mean that “a pan-*zhengfa*-apparatus rectification campaign is not a decision that the Party makes lightly.”⁵⁰ Moreover, Chen Yixin’s references to the party’s rectification campaigns in Yan’an (延安整

风, *Yan'an zhengfeng*) as models for the upcoming rectification have heightened speculation that the campaign will be ruthless and that it will serve as an exercise in personal power consolidation for Xi Jinping.⁵¹ Because several of Xi Jinping's former rivals previously held important positions in the *zhengfa xitong*, personnel purges may be designed to consolidate Xi's personal hold over the political-legal system.⁵²

It is notable that the campaign is being led by Chen Yixin, a close associate of Xi Jinping, rather than Guo Shengkun, who is the formal head of the Central Political-Legal Commission but who is not close to Xi. Chen, currently an alternate member of the Central Committee, worked with Xi in Zhejiang and quickly rose to prominence, serving in several key roles: as deputy director of the General Office of the Central Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (a group created by Xi Jinping); as party secretary of Wuhan and deputy party secretary of Hubei; and now as secretary-general of the CPLC, while also playing a major role in China's response to the coronavirus outbreak.⁵³

As previously noted in *China Leadership Monitor*, Xi Jinping has replaced many of the top leaders in this political-legal system with people who are close personal associates (with Guo Shengkun as one of the highest-ranking exceptions).⁵⁴ The most recent four to transition out of the political-legal apparatus are Fu Zhenghua, minister of Justice who resigned as deputy party chief within the ministry in late April as he approached retirement age;⁵⁵ Meng Hongwei, the deputy minister of Public Security and head of Interpol who was detained in fall 2018 and sentenced in January 2020 on corruption charges;⁵⁶ Sun Lijun, an official with a background working on both Hong Kong and public health; and Gong Dao'an, deputy mayor and head of the municipal Public Security Bureau in Shanghai, who was placed under investigation in August 2020.⁵⁷ Party rhetoric describing Sun's removal was caustic, characterizing his fall as "an inevitable result of his long-standing disregard of party political discipline and political rules, his failure to observe discipline and rules, [and for his display of a lack of] awe and wanton behavior," the latter of which was interpreted as showing insufficient respect and deference to Xi Jinping.⁵⁸ Both Meng Hongwei and Sun Lijun were also close to fallen CPLC head Zhou Yongkang, and the meeting made it clear that this was part of the reason for their removal, arguing that it was necessary to "eliminate the influence of Zhou Yongkang, Meng Hongwei, Sun Lijun, and others from the ideological, political, organizational, and work style."

These efforts suggest a continued push on Xi Jinping's part to remake China's coercive apparatus into a force that is entirely politically responsive to his direction. During his first term, Xi concentrated on anti-corruption efforts within the PLA and laid out a new framework for thinking about domestic security as well as beginning to replace some of the top leadership in the political-legal apparatus. His second term has seen more emphasis on re-making the domestic security apparatus, including personnel replacement throughout the leadership team within the Ministry of Public Security.⁵⁹ It may be that on the heels of a successful 19th Party Congress,⁶⁰ and having replaced most of the leadership of the political-legal system, Xi has decided to use the *saohei* campaign (which was launched in January 2018 after the 19th Party Congress) – and more recently, the upcoming education and rectification campaign – to push his authority downward to the lower levels of the political-legal system, thereby consolidating fuller control over the political-legal system by the time of the 20th Party Congress in 2022. That this campaign is centered in the party-state's newly reorganized and centralized discipline-and-supervision agency is further evidence both that the ongoing trend is toward centralization, and that this centralization is intended to consolidate Xi Jinping's leadership.

In estimating the impact of the remaining months of the *saohei* campaign and next year's education and rectification campaign, at least three additional developments could affect the trajectory of the political-legal system. The first development is the creation of a "peaceful China construction and coordination team" led by Guo Shengkun, announced in April. In July, this body announced a new task force for "political security" (a term often used to refer to the security of the ruling party) led by Lei Dongsheng, which is being added to existing task forces that focus on social security and security affairs at the municipal level.⁶¹ The second potential development has to do with ongoing rumors about investigations into Meng Jianzhu, who was a patron of the recently removed Sun Lijun.⁶² Third, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in China, the CCDI and State Supervision Commission have placed increased focus on anti-corruption efforts in the medical field, which may distract their lower-level agents from a unified focus on the political-legal apparatus.⁶³ How these factors unfold and interact with each other will have a strong impact on the future shape and behavior of China's political-legal system.

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=84019396>

Notes

¹ The name is sometimes translated more poetically as the Campaign to Sweep Away Black and Eliminate Evil. “中共中央，国务院发出《关于开展扫黑除恶专项斗争的通知》” [“The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council Issue ‘Notice on Carrying out a Special Campaign to Crack Down on Underworld Forces’”], Xinhua, 24 January 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-01/24/c_1122309773.htm. See also “把扫黑除恶专项斗争不断推向深入” [“Pushing Forward the Special Campaign to Crack Down on Underworld Forces”], *Legal Daily*, 13 October 2019, http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/zt/content/2019-10/13/content_8015733.htm

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⁵ “从 ‘打’ 黑除恶到 ‘扫’ 黑除恶, 一字之变有何深意?” [“What is the Meaning of Changing from ‘Smashing’ Black and Eliminating Evil to ‘Sweeping’ Black and Eliminating Evil?”], Xinhua, 24 January 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-01/24/c_1122310603.htm

⁶ Ibid.; for academic perspectives, see 张翔, 李康震, “广东省黑社会性质组织犯罪实证调查研究: 基于已判刑的 25 个黑社会性质组织的考察” [Zhang Xiang and Li Kangzhen, “An Empirical Study of Underworld Crimes in Guangdong Province: Based on an Investigation of 25 Sentenced Underworld Organizations”], *Journal of Jiangxi Police Institute*, No. 3 (2018): 44–48; 黄京平, “黑恶势力利用‘软暴力’犯罪的若干问题” [Huang Jingping, “Some Problems of ‘Soft Violence’ Crimes Committed by Mafia-like Gangs”], *Journal of Beijing Union University* 16, No. 2 (2018): 1–12, 23.

⁷ 余志忠, 林磊山, “扫黑除恶中村干部涉黑涉恶问题研究” [Yu Zhizhong and Lin Leisha, “Study of the Problem of Village Cadres’ Involvement in the Organized Crime”], *Research on Crime and Transformation*, No. 8 (2018): 10–15; 李小华, “试析扫黑除恶中村干部涉黑涉恶问题” [Li Xiaohua, “Analysis of the Problem of Village Cadres’ Involvement in Organized Crime in the Process of the Saohei Campaign”], *Legal Vision*, No. 4 (2019): 165.

⁸ “从 ‘打’ 黑除恶到 ‘扫’ 黑除恶, 一字之变有何深意?” [“What is the Meaning of Changing from ‘Smashing’ Black and Eliminating Evil to ‘Sweeping’ Black and Eliminating Evil?”], Xinhua, 24 January 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-01/24/c_1122310603.htm

⁹ “扫黑除恶: 注意了! 黑恶势力‘保护伞’的 15 种类型” [“Sweep Away Black and Eliminate Evil: Pay Attention! 15 Types of ‘Protection Umbrellas’ for Underworld Forces”], Central Committee Propaganda Department, Xi’an Baqiao District, 4 April 2019, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1629848307906961525&wfr=spider&for=pc>

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¹¹ “中共中央, 国务院发出《关于开展扫黑除恶专项斗争的通知》” [“Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and State Council Issue ‘Notice on Carrying Out Special Campaign to Crack Down on Underworld Forces’”], Xinhua, 24 January 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-01/24/c_1122309773.htm.

¹² 最高人民法院、最高人民检察院、公安部、司法部印发《关于办理恶势力刑事案件若干问题的意见》的通知 [“Notice by the Supreme People’s Court, the SPP, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Justice on Issuing Opinions on Several Issues Concerning the Handling of Criminal Cases Involving Evil Forces”], 28 February 2018, translation by PKU Law, https://pkulaw.com/en_law/4608f9a438102e62bdfb.html

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¹³ For a subsequent example of a notice encouraging citizens to report (请积极举报!), see <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1629848307906961525&wfr=spider&for=pc>; for an example of a reporting/reward hotline, see <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1628356291901088627&wfr=spider&for=pc>

¹⁴ “‘扫’出清风正气 ‘扫’出朗朗乾坤” [“Get a Pure and Honest Environment and a Bright Future by ‘Sweeping’”], *Legal Daily*, 27 December 2018, http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/zt/content/2018-12/27/content_7731045.htm

¹⁵ “4位副国级‘坐镇’10位正部级督战，只为这场硬仗” [“Four Deputy State-Level Officials ‘Personally Attend to Garrison Duty’ and Ten Ministerial-Level Officials Supervise the War, Only for this Hard Battle”], *CCTV News*, 26 June 2018, <http://news.cctv.com/2018/06/26/ARTIte2hYC2wH6tmZcPQecJ180626.shtml>

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¹⁷ Similar figures are listed for subsequent rounds. See “高擎督导‘利剑’再掀强大攻：中央扫黑除恶第二、第三轮督导综述” [“Holding High the ‘Sharp Sword’ of Supervision and Launching a Powerful Offensive Again: Summary of the Second and Third Rounds of the *Saohei* Campaign’s Supervision Work”], Xinhua, 16 August 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-08/16/c_1124885922.htm

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- ⁶¹ “平安中国建设协调小组政治安全专项组第一次会议召开” [“First Meeting of the Peaceful China Construction and Coordination Group is Held”], *Renmin fayuan bao*, 6 July 2020, <http://www.court.gov.cn/zixun-xiangqing-239421.html>; Jun Mai, “China Sets Up Task Force to Boost Political Policing Amid Threats to Stability,” *South China Morning Post*, 6

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⁶² Katsuji Nakazawa, “Xi Returns to his Favorite Hobby: Crushing Dissent,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 23 April 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/Xi-returns-to-his-favorite-hobby-crushing-dissent>; Ling Li, “New Political-Legal Rectification Campaign, 2020–21,” *China Collection*, 14 July 2020, <https://thechinacollection.org/new-political-legal-rectification-campaign-2020-2021/>;

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