

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Who Commands the Gun? Mobilization and Use of China's Armed Police

Joel Wuthnow

Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, US National Defense University, Washington, DC, USA

Corresponding author: Joel Wuthnow, email: joel.wuthnow.civ@ndu.edu

(First published online 16 September 2022)

Abstract

Recent reforms to China's People's Armed Police have changed the balance of authority between central and local officials, continuing a pattern of reduced local control and granting more authority to Xi Jinping in his role as Central Military Commission chairman. The new system, however, attempts to balance central control with provisions that allow local officials down to the prefecture level to take command in some circumstances. This system intends to allow for rapid mobilization in cases of social unrest or natural disasters, although a review of emergency response plans and other Chinese sources indicates uneven implementation. The risk is that centralization could slow emergency response, although the effects will depend on the nature of civil–military coordination at different levels. The paper describes new legal authorities, assesses implementation and challenges, and reaches conclusions about the implications for Chinese political control and emergency response.

摘要

中国人民武装警察部队最近的改革改变了中央和地方官员之间的权力平衡，继续减少地方控制的模式，并赋予习近平作为中央军委主席的更多权力。然而，新制度试图在中央控制与允许地方官员在某些情况下至地级的规定之间取得平衡。该系统旨在允许在社会动荡或自然灾害的情况下迅速动员，尽管对应急预算和其他中国消息来源的审查表明实施不平衡。风险在于集中化可能会减缓应急处置效力，尽管其影响将取决于不同级别的军民协调的性质。该文件描述了新的法律权威，评估了实施和挑战，并得出对中国政治控制和应急处置的影响的结论。

Keywords: People's Armed Police; emergency response; internal security; China; Xi Jinping

关键词: 人民武装警察部队; 应急处置; 国内安全; 中国; 习近平

On 1 January 2018, China ended the “dual leadership” system governing the People's Armed Police (PAP) in which the State Council and Central Military Commission (CMC) shared responsibilities. Sole authority was granted to the CMC. Local officials down to the prefecture level would no longer be able to call out the PAP to handle protests or natural disasters and would instead need to submit requests through a new “mission request and work coordination mechanism” (*renwu xuqiu he gong-zuo xietiao jizhi* 任务需求和工作协调机制).¹ The decision promotes unified central control of the PAP, implying several consequences including stronger authority in the hands of Xi Jinping 习近平 in his office as CMC chairman, reduced authority for the State Council, and fewer opportunities for local mismanagement of the PAP. But it also raises questions for the balance of central and local authority over China's premier paramilitary force: how does the new coordination system work

¹ “Zhonggong zhongyang jue ding tiaozheng Zhongguo wuzhuang jingcha budui lingdao zhihui tizhi” (CCP Central Committee decides to adjust the PAP leadership and command system). *People's Daily*, 28 December 2017.

in practice? In what cases can local officials still utilize the armed police? What are the implications for China's ability to handle emergencies?

The answers to these questions implicate the nature of authority over a vast force that in recent years has been modernized and has undertaken high-profile missions. The PAP consists of more than 500,000 personnel in units distributed across all of China's provinces and provincial-level cities.² It has acquired military-grade equipment such as helicopters and armoured personnel carriers suitable for dangerous and complex missions.³ Recent reforms have streamlined its structure to emphasize internal security, counterterrorism and disaster relief missions, while placing the China Coast Guard under its purview and divesting certain auxiliary forces.⁴ Its scale and capabilities have made the PAP an ideal force for responding to emergencies such as the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, 2009 Xinjiang unrest, 2019 Hong Kong protests, the 2020 coronavirus epidemic response in Wuhan, and 2021 large-scale flooding in Zhengzhou.⁵

Nevertheless, the PAP still exists primarily to support a local emergency response. The PAP maintains contingents in all of China's provinces and provincial-level cities, with smaller detachments spread across the country. These units have capabilities, such as heavy equipment and helicopters, that may be needed if a conflict expands beyond the capacity of local police or first responders. By removing local officials from the chain of command, the Party centre accepted the risk that any local use of the PAP could be slowed by procedural delays, hesitation among local officials and friction between civilians and the military. Those tensions could be most apparent in smaller crises or in the early phases of larger ones, before central leaders have provided clear guidance. Reformers tried to manage those risks through the new coordination system, but questions remain about the design and implementation of the mechanism.

This article seeks to gain a better understanding of the tension between the centralization of the PAP and the requirements for its local employment. It does so from three perspectives. The first is through an analysis of the 2020 PAP Law, which allows the armed police to mobilize without higher approval but only in vaguely defined cases. Second is a review of emergency response plans issued following the new law. These plans, which are promulgated by administrations down to the county level, explain the roles and responsibilities of the PAP and other actors in emergency operations. The plans confirm that local officials can request support from PAP units at the same level, but they contain important ambiguities about how the armed police can be used and the thresholds that would spur PAP involvement. The third perspective presents evidence from reports detailing how localities have recently interacted with the PAP. Together, the findings suggest that centralization, despite its political benefits for Xi and the Party, could incur a practical cost as localities are in a weakened position to effectively use this key asset to maintain order.

This argument proceeds in five sections. The first section explains the gradual tendency towards the centralization of authority over the armed police since the 1980s and describes key changes under Xi. The second explains that the focus of the PAP continues to be on supporting local officials, who are now outside the formal chain of command. The third leverages data from emergency response plans to characterize the specificity and variation in the coordination system. The fourth section speculates about the conditions under which bureaucratic delays, political disincentives to act and civilian–military disagreements could reduce the effectiveness of China's emergency

2 For background, see Cheung 1996; Cooper 2012; Tanner 2015; Wuthnow 2019.

3 International Institute of Strategic Studies 2021, 257–58; Wuthnow 2019.

4 For an overview, see Wuthnow 2019. On the Coast Guard, see Morris 2019. For a recent PLA discussion of the PAP, see Xiao 2020, 423–435.

5 Zeng and Leibold 2017; “800 armed police start rescue operation in quake-hit SW China.” *Xinhua*, 13 May 2008, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew/eng/jbwzlm/zxxx/t452470.htmTorode>; “Military medics leave Wuhan after fulfilling anti-virus duties.” *China Daily*, 17 April 2020; “PLA deploys 5,700 to aid disaster relief efforts after Central China floods.” *China Daily*, 21 July 2021.

response. The conclusion assesses the implications for political authority and emergency response during the Xi era and offers thoughts for additional research.

Central Command

Since the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has gradually tightened its authority over the PAP. When first established in 1982, the PAP was a “constituent” part of the public security system, with local authorities possessing significant discretion over its operations. This reversed what Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 perceived as an overconcentration of power during the Mao era, including centralized control over the PAP’s predecessor, the Public Security Corps.⁶ However, by 1995, the PAP’s poor performance during the Tiananmen crisis and Jiang Zemin’s 江泽民 consolidation of power led to a joint State Council and CMC directive that strengthened central oversight over the PAP personnel system but kept control local during emergencies.⁷ Institutionally, this was accomplished through a system in which public security department directors served as first political commissars of PAP units at the same level.

Central leaders began to limit the scope of local authority over the PAP in 1997.⁸ A directive issued by the Central Committee and the State Council that year clarified the types of armed police support that officials at different levels would be able to request. While this directive was not published, Murray Scot Tanner discovered some details in local emergency response plans issued later. For instance, one plan stated that a city government could activate a PAP squadron (*zhongdui* 中队) of fewer than 100 personnel, the provincial public security bureau could activate a group (*dadui* 大队) of less than 300, and approval of the provincial Party committee and government was necessary to mobilize up to 1,000 police.⁹ The directive also required authorities to report those activities to higher-level PAP headquarters and higher state administrative authorities.

Abuse of the PAP by local officials in the 1990s and 2000s contributed to a further tightening of control. Examples include the use of the armed police to collect tax revenue, to enforce the one-child policy and to illegally seize land.¹⁰ There were also cases in which PAP units acting under local authority used deadly force against protesters, which was at odds with the preference of central leaders that those tensions be resolved peacefully.¹¹ The most famous case was the slaughter of over a dozen rural residents in Shanwei 汕尾, Guangdong province, after a land dispute in December 2005.¹² Such cases prompted a professor at the PAP Academy to condemn the “arbitrariness of local governments to use police forces,” which were often summoned through “verbal notification” rather than a more formal process, and to recommend that the “law should clarify the authority of local Party committees when mobilizing police forces.”¹³

The August 2009 PAP Law, in this context, legislated tighter control over the PAP.¹⁴ Article 8 notes that the State Council and the CMC would issue deployment guidance and that any violations should be immediately reported. Article 10 states that only public security authorities above the county (*xianji yi shang* 县级以上) could mobilize the PAP. The law also narrowed the types of situations in which the PAP could be used. In the area of social unrest, the final version references “riots, turbulence, severe violent crimes, terrorist attacks, and other social security incidents,”

6 The corps was established in 1949 and was reformed several times during the Mao era. For a comprehensive history, see Tanner 2002, 589–596.

7 *Ibid.*, 606–08.

8 The same year, 14 PLA divisions were transferred to the PAP. These units, unlike the provincial contingents, remained under the firm control of PAP headquarters.

9 Tanner 2015, 450–51.

10 Tanner 2002, 613.

11 Guo 2012, 242–43; Lee 2008.

12 French 2005.

13 Zhang 2013.

14 National People’s Congress 2009. For analysis, see Tanner 2014 and Wu, Sun and Fichtelberg 2011.

discouraging intervention in less serious cases.¹⁵ Once under local authority, Article 9 allows “target units” (i.e. those being supported) to give “professional guidance” to the PAP.

The most recent reforms mark only the latest step in the process of centralization. In December 2017, the Central Committee announced that the armed police would be placed under the “unified leadership” of the CMC. This decision ended the previous dual leadership system in which the military and State Council shared responsibility.¹⁶ This meant that public security officials would no longer serve on PAP Party committees and that the military would be responsible for PAP operations, budgets, size and composition.¹⁷ In June 2020, the National People’s Congress approved an updated PAP Law that formalized the new arrangements.¹⁸ Article 10 states that in peacetime, the PAP would be directed by the CMC, or other organs as authorized by the CMC; while in wartime, it could take orders from one of the PLA’s five theatre commands. While a continuation of earlier trends, the further centralization of control provides a degree of authority to the CMC chairman unequalled since the Mao era.

Part of the explanation can be traced to the larger process of consolidating authority over the major tools of coercive power under Xi Jinping.¹⁹ Xi may have been particularly wary about the possibility of political rivals developing power bases within the PAP, with the case of Bo Xilai 薄熙来 still fresh in his mind as he assumed power in November 2012 – Bo famously mobilized PAP units to apprehend his former police chief, Wang Lijun 王立军, who had fled to the US consulate in Chengdu with damaging information about Bo.²⁰ Restricting deployment authority and placing provincial PAP contingents under the CMC revised the chain of command in a way that advantaged Xi and disempowered provincial leaders.

A second explanation concerns Xi’s emphasis on transferring authority from the state to the Party. In general, Xi has diagnosed an atrophying of the Party as a threat to national development: only a strong Party, in his analysis, can set and implement an agenda to correct economic and social problems, ensure the country’s security from foreign and external threats, and set the stage for “national rejuvenation” by mid-century.²¹ Various changes under Xi, including constitutional revisions, new or updated organizations and personnel shifts have been designed to strengthen the Party, often at the expense of the state.²² Through the 2020 PAP Law, the Party strengthened its grasp of the paramilitary forces by eliminating the dual leadership (thus eliminating authority previously held by the State Council).

15 Jonathan Walton notes that the early drafts were more ambiguous. Walton 2015, 67. Moreover, the PAP’s role in the July 2009 Urumqi protests influenced the NPC’s decision to consolidate language on its responsibilities to focus on more severe incidents. See “Zhongguo ni lifa mingque wujing chuzhi baoluan zhize zhi hang ba xiang anbao renwu” (China plans legislation to clarify the responsibilities of the PAP to deal with eight types of public security tasks). *National People’s Congress Online*, 25 August 2009, http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/huiyi/cwh/1110/2009-08/25/content_1515265.htm.

16 *People’s Daily*, 28 December 2017.

17 Wuthnow 2019, 6.

18 National People’s Congress 2020.

19 In the military, Xi moved to strengthen the office of CMC chairman and reorganized the bureaucracy to limit the power of opponents. See Saunders and Wuthnow 2019. He also used anti-corruption campaigns to clear out and intimidate opponents and oversaw the removal of term limits on his role as president, thus allowing him to remain in that position beyond 2023. See Shirk 2018. This also paralleled Xi’s consolidation over the PLA. See Mulvenon 2018.

20 Chinese and foreign media speculated that Xi sought to eliminate the possibility that a rival could develop a power base within the PAP, as his opponents Bo Xilai and Zhou Yongkang had allegedly done towards the end of the Hu era. Wuthnow 2019, 17; Heath 2019. However, since reforms to the PAP came six years into Xi’s tenure, it is unlikely that he sensed an immediate threat.

21 Xi 2019.

22 Lawrence 2018. For instance, the creation of the National Supervision Commission in 2018 strengthened Party control over anti-corruption investigations by effectively extending the Party’s anti-corruption system to cover non-Party employees of the state and state-owned enterprises. See Horsley 2018.

Local Responsibilities

The dilemma created by increased centralization is that the PAP still exists primarily to support local emergency response. This imperative is apparent in the 2020 law, which states that civil authorities can request support in four cases: security for major events, unexpected social security incidents, counterterrorism and rescue operations. That law provides a general legal framework to clarify the PAP's responsibilities and passes authority for approving regulations on matters such as deployments to the CMC. Yet the PAP is also referenced in China's emergency response plans (*yingji yusuan* 应急预案), which are managed by the State Council and local emergency management bureaus down to the county level.²³ Reference to these plans provides a more detailed picture of how local authorities anticipate that the PAP may still be employed despite the larger pattern of centralization.

China's current system of emergency response plans dates to the 2003 SARS epidemic, but the 2018 reorganization of the State Council, which created a Ministry of Emergency Management responsible for humanitarian and disaster relief, sparked a revision of some plans.²⁴ The universe of plans numbers in the thousands, if one assumes that each of China's 1,355 counties has developed at least a single framework plan. Those available on public websites represent only a small fraction of the plans in the hundreds.²⁵ This section focuses narrowly on two dozen plans, selected according to four criteria: availability, date (those issued following the 2020 PAP Law were included), variation in administrative level (national, provincial, prefectural and county) and type (general framework plans and specific contingency plans). The sample is not necessarily representative of the broader universe and cannot answer important questions (such as deployment authorities, which may only be found in internal CMC guidance) but it remains useful as it offers concrete data on how localities describe coordination with the PAP, the nature of PAP participation in local crises and thresholds for summoning the armed police.

Maintaining public security is the most common mission for the PAP in recent emergency response plans. Minor cases of social unrest are usually handled by the public security departments, which remain under local authority control and have acquired stronger capabilities and better equipment in recent years.²⁶ For instance, local police now regularly conduct armed patrols and municipalities have unveiled "smart city" technologies which permit more widespread surveillance of local populations.²⁷ The PAP comes into play in more serious cases.²⁸ At the provincial level, all three geological incident plans in Table 2 anticipate that the PAP would assist local public security authorities, with the Jiangxi and Jiangsu plans using the common phrase that these forces would "maintain public order and protect important targets" (*weihu dangdi zhixu, baowei zhongyao mubiao* 维护当地秩序, 保卫重要目标). The Jiangxi plan states more specifically that PAP units would participate in a "public security maintenance work team" (*zhi'an weihu zu* 治安维护组) led by the public security office (*gongan ting* 公安厅), where they would control traffic, defend key sites, combat theft, robbery and looting, and work to counter false "rumours."²⁹

23 Not all plans that have been updated follow the reforms – the overall national plan issued by the State Council is a prime example. That plan dates from 2005. See "Guojia tufa gonggong shijian zongti yingji yu'an" (National overall emergency plan for sudden public incidents.) Government of the People's Republic of China, 7 August 2005, http://www.gov.cn/yjgl/2005-08/07/content_21048.htm.

24 This is notable in natural disasters, which fall within the remit of the Ministry of Emergency Management, but not in internal security, which remains a function of the Ministry of Public Security.

25 Plans tend to be found on local government or Party websites. At the national level, the State Council Ministry of Emergency Management has compiled and posted some plans at: <https://www.mem.gov.cn/fw/yjya/>.

26 Control of local police remained firmly under localities despite the opposite tendency within the PAP. See Tanner 2007.

27 Atha et al. 2020; Wan and Jing 2014.

28 No plans specifically tailored to social unrest were uncovered for this paper, but Jonathan Walton provides some detail in a 2015 chapter. See Walton 2015, 68–71.

29 Jiangxi Provincial Government 2020.

Similar responsibilities can be found in emergency response plans at other administrative levels. The national plan for maritime oil spills gives the PAP a role in implementing “temporary control of dangerous areas to maintain social stability.”³⁰ The Anyang city 安阳市 earthquake plan states that the PLA would help secure “key targets” such as Party and government compounds, warehouses, supply distribution points, prisons and detention centres.³¹ All three county emergency response plans in Table 3 envision the PAP playing similar roles. The Xing’an 兴安 plan, for instance, states that the local PAP squadron (*zhongdui* 中队) would protect key facilities, people and resources, maintain public order, counter illegal activities and “spare no effort to maintain social stability where emergencies are occurring.”³²

Several plans also describe direct PAP roles in disaster relief. The national forest and grassland fire plan includes the PAP and the PLA as “cross-regional” forces that may supplement local fire-fighters by supplying emergency air rescue aircraft and other specialized equipment.³³ Alluding to the role of the Coast Guard, which was placed under PAP authority in 2018, a national maritime oil spill plan issued by the Ministry of Transportation states that the PAP would coordinate with “relevant departments” and take the lead in rescuing victims and evacuating those in danger.³⁴ The Guangdong geological incident response plan explains that the PAP will organize forces both to ensure public security and to “rescue the threatened masses.”³⁵ Similarly, the Suzhou city government’s August 2020 plan for railway incidents states that the PAP will assist in providing transportation for “the masses” and treating the wounded.³⁶

The roles assigned to the PAP are consistent with recent organizational changes that narrowed its missions and capabilities. Previously, the PAP contained diverse units including the Hydropower Force, the Forestry Force and the Firefighting Force, all of which could have served as first responders. Under the reforms, these forces have been moved primarily to ministries under the State Council.³⁷ What remains in the PAP are forces focused on internal security, including duty units (*zhiqin budui* 执勤部队) responsible for guarding government compounds, mobile detachments (*jidong zongdui* 机动支队) within the provinces, and two national mobile contingents (*jidong zongdui* 机动总队) that contain specialized capabilities such as counterterrorism and transportation units, in addition to the Coast Guard.³⁸ Emergency response plans thus take into account these available capabilities.

Ambiguous Coordination

Chinese reformers needed to balance the centralization of authority with the practical necessity of making armed police capabilities available to the State Council and local emergency management departments. The updated PAP Law states that both national ministries and localities should create

30 Ministry of Transportation 2018.

31 Anyang City Government 2021. As another provincial-level example, the Heilongjiang forest and grassland fire plan explains that the PAP may conduct rescue work and cooperate with the public security department to “maintain order at the fire accident scene.” See Heilong Provincial Government 2021.

32 Xing’an County Government 2020.

33 Ministry of Emergency Management of the PRC 2020. Similarly, the Shijiazhuang municipal fire plan includes the local PAP detachment in the “emergency rescue team” (*qiangxian jiuyuan zu*) that would conduct rescue operations. See Shijiazhuang Municipal Government 2020.

34 Ministry of Transportation 2018.

35 Guangdong Provincial Government 2021.

36 Suzhou City Government 2020.

37 The Guards Force was placed in the Ministry of Public Security, while the Forestry Force and the Firefighting Force went to the Emergency Management Department. See Wuthnow 2019, 15–16.

38 Ibid. The mobile contingents replaced 14 mobile divisions that had been transferred from the PLA in 1997 and were always under the authority of PAP headquarters. Emergency response plans do not reference the new mobile contingents, but presumably only state ministries would be able to request these national-level assets.

“mission request and work coordination mechanisms” with the PAP to strengthen the “organic unification of high-level command.”³⁹ This is not a new concept – the 2007 Law on Responding to Sudden Incidents required governments above the county level to include PLA and PAP representatives in emergency response command agencies – but is more significant in the context of reduced formal local authority.⁴⁰ Once activated, Article 13 stipulates that the PAP would participate in “command organs” above the county level (for a comparison with the text of the 2009 law, see the Appendix).

Understanding that the PAP may need to move more quickly in a crisis, the 2020 law contains a key loophole. Article 12 states that in “major disasters, dangers, or terrorist incidents” that “seriously threaten public safety,” the PAP can mobilize and report its activities at the same time: formal approval would not be required. This clause was not present in the early drafts of the law and was likely added to preserve some degree of flexibility in emergency situations.⁴¹ Underscoring this flexibility, a year after the law was passed, the director of the Legal Work Committee of the NPC Standing Committee observed that four of the PAP’s six missions involve support for local officials and emphasized the statement in Article 12 that PAP units are able to “report while acting” (*bian xingdong bian baogao* 边行动边报告).⁴² Nevertheless, the law is ambiguous on when this caveat could be invoked, implying that the PAP itself has some discretion.

Emergency response plans detail how the coordination system is evolving in practice but also suggest variation and ambiguities on key issues. One consistent theme is lateral coordination.⁴³ At the national level, the Ministry of Emergency Management’s forest and grassland fire plan states that a command centre would request PAP assistance through the CMC Joint Staff Department.⁴⁴ Similarly, Shaanxi province’s forest and grassland fire plan notes that the provincial Party committee and government can “apply” (*shenqing* 申请) to deploy the PAP provincial contingent.⁴⁵ The earthquake response plan for Anyang, a prefecture-level city in Henan, allows authorities to request support through the local PAP detachment.⁴⁶ None of the county plans describes a direct channel; presumably, requests would have to be routed through prefectures or higher levels. Table 1 describes coordinating relations.

There is wider variation in the anticipated role of the PAP in the local emergency response structure. One way to assess coordination is to look at similar plans across provinces. Based on data

39 *People’s Daily*, 28 December 2017.

40 “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tufa shijian yingdui fa” (People’s Republic of China law on responding to sudden incidents), 30 August 2007, http://www.gov.cn/flfg/2007-08/30/content_732593.htm.

41 “PRC People’s Armed Police Law (Draft Revision).” Available at *China Law Translate*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/draft-armed-police-law/>.

42 “Xin xiuding wujing fa shishi yinian, ruhe goujian jundi xietiao liandong xin geju” (A year after promulgating the new revision of the PAP Law, how to build a new structure for military–locality coordination?). *Nanfang zhoumo*, 28 July 2021. Chinese sources reveal that revised deployment guidelines have also been released in recent years. One 2018 article notes that the Central Committee has issued documents “stipulating the approval authority and procedures for the use of armed police forces for major activities, including security, anti-terrorism, stability, duty and emergency rescue,” while the PAP has produced “a number of supporting regulations ... to ensure the normal and long-term operation of the military–locality coordination mechanism and the smooth flow of military and political orders.” Ouyang and Zhang 2018. Other guidance mentioned in local emergency response plans can be found in: “Zhongguo renmin wuzhuang jingcha budui bushu bingli tiaodong pizhun quanxian zanxing guiqing” (Interim provisions on the authorization of the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force to approve the deployment of forces), referenced in Pengze County Government 2021, and in the “Jiefangjun he wujing budui canjia yingji jiuyuan xingdong duijie banfa” (Coordination method for PLA and PAP participation in emergency rescue operations), referenced in Henan Provincial Government 2021. Details on these and other rules, however, have not been made public.

43 The plans do not specify the PAP’s internal process once the request has been received.

44 Ministry of Emergency Management of the PRC 2020. The CMC Joint Staff Department would presumably task PAP headquarters.

45 Shaanxi Provincial Government 2021.

46 Anyang City Government 2021.

Table 1. Coordinating Relationship by Administrative Level

Administrative Level	PAP Counterpart	Request Via
State Council Ministry	PAP HQ Mobile contingent (<i>jidong zongdui</i> 机动总队)	CMC Joint Operations Command Centre or PAP HQ
Province/provincial-level city	Provincial PAP contingent (<i>zongdui</i> 总队)	Contingent HQ
Prefecture/prefectural-level city	Detachment (<i>zhidui</i> 支队)	Detachment HQ
County/county-level city	Battalion (<i>dadui</i> 大队) or squadron (<i>zhongdui</i> 中队)	Prefecture government or Party committee

Table 2. Comparison of Provincial Geological Incident Plans

	Jiangxi Emergency Plan for Sudden Geological Disasters ^a	Jiangsu Emergency Plan for Sudden Geological Disasters ^b	Guangdong Emergency Plan for Sudden Geological Disasters ^c
<i>Plan approved</i>	June 2020	January 2020	January 2021
<i>PAP role in provincial emergency management system</i>	Jiangxi Provincial Contingent, member, emergency command organ	Jiangsu Provincial Contingent, member, emergency command organ	Not specified
<i>PAP participation in command system work teams (zhìhuì jīgòu gōngzuò zǔ 指挥机构工作组)</i>	Search and rescue team, public security maintenance team	Not specified	Search and rescue team, public security maintenance team
<i>Local coordinator for PAP intervention</i>	Jiangxi Emergency Management Office	Jiangsu Emergency Management Office	Not specified
<i>PAP roles</i>	Organize PAP troops to participate in HA/DR, cooperate w/ public security, defend key facilities	Organize PAP troops to participate in HA/DR, cooperate w/ public security, defend key facilities	Organize and command PAP units to participate in HA/DR, assist in maintaining public order and rescue threatened people
<i>PAP deployment threshold</i>	Not specified	Request PAP for Level I, II, III disasters (nothing for Level IV) ^d	Not specified

Notes: ^aJiangxi Provincial Government 2020; ^bJiangsu Provincial Emergency Management Office 2020; ^cGuangdong Provincial Government 2021; ^dthe four levels refer to very large, large, medium and small geological incidents, respectively.

availability, Table 2 compares the “emergency plans for sudden geological incidents” (*tufa dizhi zai-hai yingji yusuan* 突发地质灾害应急预案) in Jiangxi, Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces. The three plans use similar language, suggesting that they were based on a common framework provided by a higher authority, but they also vary in places. In the Jiangxi and Jiangsu plans, the provincial PAP contingent is a member of the provincial emergency command organ that would be established by the provincial government in certain cases. These two plans also note that coordination would take place via the provincial emergency response office (*yingji ting* 应急厅). In two others (Jiangxi and Guangdong), PAP personnel would be involved in subordinate “work teams,” focusing on search and rescue and internal security operations.

Table 3. Comparison of County Overall Emergency Response Plans

	Xing'an County Overall Public Emergency Response Plan ^a	Fengjie County Overall Public Emergency Response Plan ^b	Xiuwen County Overall Public Emergency Response Plan ^c
<i>Province/provincial-level city</i>	Jiangxi	Chongqing	Guizhou
<i>Plan approved</i>	July 2020	February 2021	May 2021
<i>PAP role in county emergency management system</i>	Member, county emergency management committee	Fengjie PAP <i>dadui</i> is part of an ad-hoc emergency response coordination mechanism	Xiuwen PAP <i>zhongdui</i> is a “backbone force,” which can be deployed according to “relevant guidelines”
<i>Local coordinator for PAP intervention</i>	County emergency management committee chaired by county deputy Party secretary	Not specified	Not specified
<i>PAP roles</i>	Transportation, public security maintenance, communications support	Specialized emergency response team, public security maintenance	Public security maintenance
<i>PAP deployment threshold</i>	Not specified	PAP represented in command post for Level I, II emergencies	Not specified

Notes: ^aXing'an County Government 2020; ^bFengjie County Government 2021; ^cXiuwen County Government 2021; ^dthese refer to very large and large public emergencies. The lower tiers are “rather large” (*jiaoda*) and normal (*yiban*) emergencies.

Similar analysis can be performed at lower administrative tiers. Table 3 compares three “overall sudden public emergency response plans” (*tufa gonggong shijian zongti yingji yusuan* 突发公共事件总体应急预案) in three counties: Xing'an (Jiangxi), Fengjie 奉节县 (Chongqing municipality) and Xiuwen 修文 (Guizhou). Here, there is even wider variation. The Xing'an plan specifies that a representative from the local PAP squadron (*zhongdui*) should sit on the county's “emergency management committee” (*xian yingji wei* 县应急委), which would be established in emergencies. It also designates the county's “emergency management committee” as the entity responsible for coordinating PAP activities. The committee would, “in times of necessity,” request (*baoqing* 报请) support from both the local PLA garrison and the PAP. The Fengjie plan includes the local PAP battalion (*dadui*) in its emergency response coordination mechanism, while the Xiuwen plan only describes the PAP as a force that could be utilized based on “relevant guidelines.”

The most significant variation concerns guidance on the thresholds requiring the activation of the PAP. Some plans are completely silent while others use ambiguous language, such as local officials calling out the armed police “in times of necessity” (*biyao shi* 必要时)⁴⁷ or “when it is difficult or impossible to effectively control the situation by relying on [local emergency rescue forces].”⁴⁸ More stringent criteria might be contained in internal documents issued by local governments, the CMC or the PAP, but it is also logical that during an emergency local officials would have some discretion. Presumably, requests would need to detail *why* support is required, and the PAP chain of command would have to agree.

47 Ministry of Emergency Management of the PRC 2020.

48 Xing'an County Government 2020.

Table 4. PAP Role in Shanghai Railway Emergency Response Plan, 2020

Level	Colour	Description	PAP Role
I	Red	-24 hour+ traffic disruption -over 10 dead, over 50 injured, or over 50 million yuan in damage	Implement emergency support and assist in maintaining public order, guarding key sites and resources near the scene of the accident
	Orange	-6 to 24 hour traffic disruption -4 to 10 dead, 11 to 50 wounded, or 10 to 50 million yuan in damage	
II	Yellow	-2 to 6 hour traffic disruption -up to 3 dead, 10 or fewer wounded, or 500,000 to 10 million yuan in damage	None
III	Blue	-less than 2 hour traffic disruption	None

A few plans, however, are more specific. These plans reference the four-tiered emergency coding scheme developed by the State Council after the SARS epidemic in which command arrangements, resource allocations, public communications and other procedures are linked to the severity of the crisis.⁴⁹ Among the three provincial geological incident plans in Table 2, only the Jiangsu plan utilizes this framework.⁵⁰ The plan states that in Level I and II incidents, defined as “super-large” and “large” scale disasters, the command organ would submit requests for PAP and PLA assistance, while in a Level III incident, defined as a “medium” scale disaster, these forces may be requested “depending on the situation” (*shiqing* 视情).⁵¹ No request for PAP or military support is envisioned for Level IV incidents. Even this plan permitted local discretion owing to the absence of clear metrics for determining a given level.

An example of a highly detailed plan is the Shanghai government’s plan for railway accidents, which offers specific metrics for categorizing incidents. In this plan, the two most severe incident types are included in Level I. A “red” emergency is defined as situations involving “more than ten dead” (or meeting other criteria listed in Table 4), while an “orange” emergency involves “more than three and less than ten dead.”⁵² In these two cases, the PAP would be tasked with maintaining public order and guarding key sites and resources in the vicinity of the accident. Less severe emergencies involving only minor disruptions, defined as Level II (yellow) and Level III (blue), do not require PAP assistance. This plan likely contains more specific guidance owing to the localized nature of railway accidents, which allows for quickly calculating casualties more readily than is the case in earthquakes or other more diffuse crises.

Frictions and Delays

The shift from de facto local command to a more ambiguous and variegated work coordination system raises several concerns for the effectiveness of a local emergency response. The first concern centres on bureaucratic delays. If local requests need be routed through PAP headquarters or the CMC, as some Chinese interviewees speculated, bureaucratic intransigence, disagreements or decisions punted to higher-level officials could result in approvals that are delayed or never received.⁵³ The 2020 PAP Law attempts to reduce this problem by allowing the PAP to “act while reporting”

49 Welch 2015, 88–89.

50 None of the county plans in Table 3 uses this framework.

51 Jiangsu Provincial Emergency Management Office 2020.

52 Shanghai Municipal Government 2020.

53 Interviews with PLA interlocutors, 2019.

during “major disasters” (*zhongda zaihai* 重大灾害) or “serious threats” (*yanzhong weixie* 严重威胁) to public security. However, these uncertainties, combined with the possibility of incomplete or inaccurate information about an emergency being passed on, could lead PAP officials to invoke this clause and instead process requests more conservatively through the chain of command.

The second issue concerns political disincentives to use the PAP. The PAP Law and most emergency response plans are vague about when local officials should request external support, meaning that they need to make choices about whether and when to do so. Local Party and state leaders could hesitate to request the PAP and instead rely more on local capabilities in order not to attract negative attention from higher-level officials who could blame them for failing to prevent an emergency or handle it using their own resources.⁵⁴ Delays, of course, mean that officials could fail to act until a problem has become acute (such as the 2020 pandemic in Wuhan). In situations outside their control, such as a natural disaster, officials may be less worried about the “optics” of requesting support and may conclude that taking the initiative would work to their credit.

Another concern regards disagreements over the degree of local control. The revised PAP Law and emergency response plans do not explain the parameters of control by local leaders once units have been transferred. For instance, these documents do not clarify whether local public security bureaus can direct the use of the PAP against protesters, including the use of deadly force, or how long they may use the PAP without the need to renew their authority. Depending on how internal PAP rules are codified, whether there are pre-existing agreements between the PAP and public security departments, and the nature of the relationships between PAP and local leaders, disagreements could arise over roles and responsibilities, rules of engagement, specific operations, financial burdens, and so on. Whether and how those disputes are resolved would influence the effectiveness of an emergency response.

Such frictions are likely to be most influential in smaller-scale crises or in the early stages of an emerging national crisis when the centre has not yet become actively involved. Eventually, leading CCP officials, or Xi himself, may provide clear guidance on the authority, timing and terms of PAP engagement. The centre could opt to militarize these operations, obviating questions of local control. For instance, during the 2020 coronavirus response and the July 2021 flood relief operations in Zhengzhou, the PAP was included in responses led by the military’s theatre commands.⁵⁵ The risk is that the centre, which may either be unaware or poorly informed about the situation, may not act, leaving the ability of local officials to use the PAP subject to bureaucratic frictions. Localities with clearer pre-existing guidance, as suggested in the Shanghai plans, are likeliest to make the most effective use of those capabilities.

Conclusion

Like many countries, China has wrestled with the proper balance of authority over its internal security forces.⁵⁶ The advantages of centralization include better oversight and standardization of recruitment and training, more effective integration with the military or other national-level

54 Local officials may be especially wary of putting themselves in a vulnerable position given the centre’s attempts to shift blame back to the localities. This could encourage them to avoid requests that would make themselves appear incompetent. See “Xinhua headlines: China penalizes derelict officials in coronavirus fight.” *Xinhua*, 5 February 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/05/c_138755872.htm.

55 In Wuhan, the PAP patrolled the makeshift hospital and performed other tasks for the Joint Logistic Support Force, and while in Zhengzhou, it operated under the Central Theatre Command. “Yiqie weile shengli – wujing budui quanli dahao yiqing fang kong zuji zhan” (Everything for victory – PAP launches full-scale battle against the pandemic). *Xinhua*, 11 February 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-02/11/c_1125559380.htm; “Jiefangjun he wujing budui wen ‘xun’ zai Henan duodi zhankai qiangxian jiuzai” (The PLA and PAP launched rescue operations in many parts of Henan province). *Xinhua*, 21 July 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-07/21/c_1127678728.htm.

56 See, e.g., Greitens 2016; Marat 2018; Lutterbeck 2013.

agencies, and less risk of local indiscretion. In the early 1980s, China preferred a model under which local officials down to the county level had broad discretion over the PAP, but this model has gradually shifted towards tighter management. The process of centralization took a step forward during the Xi era, with the end of a dual leadership system under which the State Council shared authority over the PAP and local officials were able to summon the PAP to handle unrest and other crises. Politically, the 2017 Central Committee decision and the 2020 PAP Law strengthened Xi's authority over the PAP through his position as CMC chairman and continued a pattern under his tenure of moving key decision-making functions from the state to the Party. Such changes serve political goals but also have important practical effects, such as reducing the scope for local abuse and increasing the PLA's ability to integrate the paramilitary force into its own planning and operations.

The disadvantages of centralization include inefficient responses as local officials need to secure permission and may be unsure about when they are empowered to act. Details from local emergency response plans verify that local officials anticipate that the PAP might still be needed to handle different types of crises, even if it plays a supporting role to local police and other first responders. Some plans also describe in depth how the PAP would be integrated into emergency operations and specify the thresholds that would trigger PAP participation. The evidence thus presents the PAP under new management as playing much the same role that it did prior to Xi.

By centralizing management while keeping the PAP's identity fixed on a local response, the Party has accepted a risk that China's emergency response could be less efficient. Local officials may hesitate to ask for support from forces that do not come under their usual area of authority and may be unsure about when and how they are empowered to use those forces. To resolve this challenge, the Party has adopted a new work coordination mechanism, although any system that requires bureaucratic approvals, potentially at the national level, will be slower than one in which authority is taken for granted. The "report while acting" provision in the 2020 PAP Law hints at an effort to address this dilemma but does not answer key questions, including when it can be invoked and what this means for local officials. Data from emergency response plans also revealed variations in depth and specificity. This could create an additional variable: administrations with more detailed planning and routine coordination with the PAP before a crisis erupts are in a better position to make use of those forces than those administrations that have given contingencies less forethought.

While this article has offered some initial findings, further research is necessary to gain a better understanding of how the updated system for mobilizing and using the PAP is evolving. The lack of access to internal deployment guidelines will continue to be a hindrance, but the availability of hundreds, if not thousands, of emergency response plans could facilitate more systematic analysis of local authorities, the nature of PAP responsibilities and deployment thresholds. Since these plans are still being updated, analysts should anticipate new sources appearing in the coming years. Meanwhile, qualitative research should focus on plans of special interest, such as those on key contingencies, or on examples drawn from press releases and local media reports highlighting how the PAP has been used in recent cases. Both types of analysis are likely to yield more detailed insights into how Xi plans to "command the gun" while acknowledging that power over those who use it must continue to be delegated.

Acknowledgements. For useful comments on earlier drafts, the author thanks R. Kim Cragin, Phillip C. Saunders and three anonymous reviewers.

Conflicts of interest. None

References

Anyang City Government. 2021. "Anyang shi renmin zhengfu bangongshi guanyu yinfa Anyang shi dizhen yingji yu'an tongzhi" (Notice of the office of the People's Government of Anyang city on issuing Anyang city's earthquake emergency plan," 3 August, <http://www.anyang.gov.cn/2021/08-03/2177697.html>).

- Atha, Katherine, Jason Callahan, John Chen, Jessica Drun, Ed Francis, Kieran Green, Brian Lafferty et al.** 2020. *China's Smart Cities Development*. Washington, DC: US–China Economic and Security Review Commission.
- Cheung, Tai Ming.** 1996. “Guarding China’s domestic front line: the People’s Armed Police and China’s stability.” *The China Quarterly* 146, 525–547.
- Cooper, Cortez A.** 2012. “Controlling the four quarters’: China trains, equips, and deploys a modern, mobile People’s Armed Police Force.” In Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Travis Tanner (eds.), *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*. Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 127–170.
- Fengjie County Government.** 2021. “Fengjie xian tufa gonggong shijian zongti yingji yu’an” (Fengjie county overall public emergency response plan), 22 February, http://www.cqj.gov.cn/zwgk_168/fdzdgnr/yjgl/yjya/202102/t20210222_8918472_wap.html.
- French, Howard W.** 2005. “Villagers tell of lethal attack by Chinese forces on protesters.” *New York Times*, 10 December.
- Greitens, Sheena Chestnut.** 2016. *Dictators and Their Secret Police*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guangdong Provincial Government.** 2021. “Guangdong sheng renmin zhengfu bangongting guanyu yinfa Guangdong sheng tufa dizhi zaihai yingji yu’an deng 4 ge zhuanxiang yingji yu’an de tongzhi” (Guangdong Provincial Government releases four special emergency plans including for sudden geological incidents), 6 January, https://www.ss.gov.cn/gkmlpt/content/4/4726/post_4726586.html.
- Guo, Xuezhai.** 2012. *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, Timothy R.** 2019. “The consolidation of political power in China under Xi Jinping.” Testimony before the US–China Economic and Security Review Commission, 7 February, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Heath_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.
- Heilongjiang Provincial Government.** 2021. “Heilongjiang sheng renmin zhengfu bangongting yinfa Heilongjiang sheng teda huozai shigu yingji yu’an de tongzhi” (Notice of the Heilongjiang Provincial Government General Office on issuing the emergency plan for major fire accidents in Heilongjiang province), 22 February, <https://www.hlj.gov.cn/n200/2021/0222/c668-11014908.html>.
- Henan Provincial Government.** 2021. “Henan sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu yinfa Henan sheng dizhen yingji yu’an de tongzhi” (Notice of the office of Henan province on the emergency plan for earthquakes in Henan province), 2 April, <https://hnjs.henan.gov.cn/2019/05-31/1127790.html>.
- Horsley, Jamie P.** 2018. “What’s so controversial about China’s new anti-corruption body?” *Brookings*, 30 May, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/whats-so-controversial-about-chinas-new-anti-corruption-body/>.
- International Institute of Strategic Studies.** 2021. *The Military Balance*. London: International Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Jiangsu Provincial Emergency Management Office.** 2020. “Sheng zhengfu bangongting guanyu yinfa Jiangsu sheng tufa dizhi zaihai yingji yu’an de tongzhi” (Provincial government office issues notice on Jiangsu province emergency plan for sudden geological incidents), 24 January, http://ajj.jiangsu.gov.cn/art/2020/1/24/art_64954_9051020.html.
- Jiangxi Provincial Government.** 2020. “Jiangxi sheng renmin zhengfu bangongting guanyu yinfa Jiangxi sheng tufa dizhi zaihai yingji yu’an de tongzhi” (Jiangxi Provincial People’s Government issues notice on the Jiangxi provincial emergency plan for sudden geological disasters), 23 June, http://www.jiangxi.gov.cn/art/2020/3/24/art_5126_1616265.html?xxgkhide=1.
- Lawrence, Susan.** 2018. “China’s Communist Party absorbs more of the state.” Congressional Research Service Report, 23 March, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10854>.
- Lee, John.** 2008. “PAP: the rise of the Party’s army.” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, 19 June, <https://jamestown.org/program/pap-the-rise-of-the-partys-army/>.
- Lutterbeck, Derk.** 2013. *The Paradox of Gendarmeries: Between Expansion, Demilitarization, and Dissolution*. Geneva: Geneva Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces.
- Marat, Erica.** 2018. *The Politics of Police Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ministry of Emergency Management of the PRC.** 2020. “Guowuyuan bangongting guanyu yinfa guojia senlin caoyuan huozai yinji yu’an de tongzhi” (Notice of the General Office of the State Council on issuing the national forest and grassland fire emergency plan), 26 October, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2020-11/23/content_5563570.htm.
- Ministry of Transportation.** 2018. “Guojia zhongda haishang yiyou yinji chuzhi yu’an” (National emergency response plan for a major maritime oil spill), March, <https://www.mot.gov.cn/zhengcejiedu/guojiazhdhsyyjczya/xiangguanzhengce/201803/P020200709617833854950.pdf>.
- Morris, Lyle.** 2019. “China welcomes its newest armed force: the Coast Guard.” *War on the Rocks*, 4 April, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/china-welcomes-its-newest-armed-force-the-coast-guard/>.
- Mulvenon, James.** 2018. “The cult of Xi and the rise of the CMC Chairman Responsibility System.” *China Leadership Monitor*, 23 January, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm55-jm-final.pdf>.
- National People’s Congress.** 2009. Zhonghua renmin gongheguo renmin wuzhuang jingcha fa (PRC People’s Armed Police Law), 27 August, http://www.gov.cn/flfg/2009-08/27/content_1403324.htm.
- National People’s Congress.** 2020. Zhonghua renmin gongheguo renmin wuzhuang jingcha fa (PRC People’s Armed Police Law), 20 June, http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2020-06/20/content_4867004.htm.
- Ouyang, Hua, and Zijun Zhang.** 2018. “Wujing budui xinxing lingdao zhihui tizhi yanjiu” (A study on the new type of leadership and command and control structure of the People’s Armed Police Force). *Guofang* 8, 43–49.

- Pengze County Government.** 2021. "Pengze xian renmin zhengfu bangongshi guanyu yinfa Pengze xian senlin zaihai yingji yu'an de tongzhi" (Notice of the office of the Pengze County Government on the emergency plan for forest fires), 2 August.
- Saunders, Phillip C., and Joel Wuthnow.** 2019. "Large and in charge: civil–military relations under Xi Jinping." In Phillip C. Saunders, Arthur S. Ding, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N.D. Yang and Joel Wuthnow (eds.), *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reform*. Washington, DC: NDU Press, 519–555.
- Shaanxi Provincial Government.** 2021. "Shaanxi sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu yinfa senlin caoyuan huozai yingji yu'an de tongzhi" (Notice of the General Office of the People's Government of Shaanxi Province on issuing an emergency plan for forest and grassland fires), 9 July, http://www.shaanxi.gov.cn/zfxgk/fdzdgnr/zcwj/szfbgtwj/szbh/202108/t20210803_2158504.html.
- Shanghai Municipal Government.** 2020. "Shanghai shi guidao jiaotong yunying tufa shijian yinji yu'an, 2020 ban" (Emergency plan for emergency incidents in Shanghai rail transit operations, 2020 edition), October, <https://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw32024/20210106/26fbde07d6f54db7b2463cb211baebfe.html>.
- Shijiazhuang Municipal Government.** 2020. "Shijiazhuang shi renmin zhengfu bangongshi guanyu yinfa Shijiazhuang shi senlin huozai yingji chuzhi yu'an" (Notice of the Shijiazhuang Municipal Government office issuing and distributing Shijiazhuang city's forest fire emergency response plan), 8 May, <https://www.sjz.gov.cn/col/1577929367245/2020/05/08/1588926920921.html>.
- Shirk, Susan L.** 2018. "China in Xi's 'new era': the return to personalistic rule." *Journal of Democracy* 29(2), 22–36.
- Suzhou City Government.** 2020. "Suzhou shi chuzhi tielu shigu yingji yu'an" (Suzhou city's emergency response plan for railway accidents), August, <https://www.suzhou.gov.cn/szsrzmf/zfbgsjw/202008/debc930b8c894680b6f59bc08ff9fd16/files/b80b2658ae114ea39210ff6e87d93b3c.pdf>.
- Tanner, Murray Scot.** 2002. "The institutional lessons of disaster: reorganizing the People's Armed Police after Tiananmen." In James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang (eds.), *The People's Liberation Army as Organization*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 587–635.
- Tanner, Murray Scot.** 2007. "Principals and secret agents: central versus local control over policing and obstacles to 'rule of law' in China." *The China Quarterly* 191, 644–670.
- Tanner, Murray Scot.** 2014. "The impact of the 2009 People's Armed Police Law on the People's Armed Police Force." In Susan Trevaskes, Elisa Nesossi, Flora Sapio and Sarah Biddulph (eds.), *The Politics of Law and Stability in China*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 202–216.
- Tanner, Murray Scot.** 2015. "China's People's Armed Police Force leadership, command, and organization in the wake of the 2009 PAP Law." In Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen (eds.), *The PLA as Organization v2.0*. Vienna, VA: DGI, 436–452.
- Torode, Greg.** 2020. "Exclusive: China's internal security force on frontlines of Hong Kong protests." *Reuters*, 18 March, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-military-exclusive/exclusive-chinas-internal-security-force-on-frontlines-of-hong-kong-protests-idUSKBN2150JZ>.
- Walton, Jonathan.** 2015. "China plans for internal unrest: People's Armed Police and public security approaches to 'mass incidents'." In Andrew Scobell, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders and Scott W. Harold (eds.), *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*. Washington, DC: NDU Press, 55–84.
- Wan, William, and Xu Jing.** 2014. "Newly armed police in China say they fear their guns as much as public." *Washington Post*, 26 September.
- Welch, Cate.** 2015. "Civilian authorities and contingency planning in China." In Andrew Scobell, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders and Scott W. Harold (eds.), *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*. Washington, DC: NDU Press, 85–106.
- Wu, Yuning, Ivan Y. Sun and Aaron Fichtelberg.** 2011. "Formalizing China's armed police: the 2009 PAP Law." *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 56, 243–263.
- Wuthnow, Joel.** 2019. *China's Other Army: The People's Armed Police in an Era of Reform*. Washington, DC: NDU Press.
- Xi, Jinping.** 2019. "Jiaqiang dang dui wuanmian yi fazhi guo de lingdao" (Strengthen the Party's all-around leadership of managing the country according to law). *Qiushi* 4, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2019-02/15/c_1124114454.htm.
- Xiao, Tianliang.** 2020. *Zhanlüe xue (Science of Strategy)*. Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe.
- Xing'an County Government.** 2020. "Xing'an xian tufa gonggong shijian zongti yinji yu'an" (Xing'an county overall public emergency plan), 8 July, <http://www.xingan.gov.cn/news-show-109329.html>.
- Xiuwen County Government.** 2021. "Xiuwen xian tufa shijian zongti yingji yu'an" (Xiuwen County overall public emergency plan), 13 May.
- Zenz, Adrian, and James Leibold.** 2017. "Xinjiang's rapidly evolving security state." Jamestown Foundation, 14 March, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/58c8f9f04.html>.
- Zhang, Liping.** 2013. "Wujing budui chuzhi quntixing shijian de falü sikao" (Legal considerations of the People's Armed Police's management of mass incidents). *Wujing shizhan xunlian yanjiu* 2(2013), 93.

Joel WUTHNOW is a senior research fellow in the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs at the US National Defense University and an adjunct professor in the security studies programme at Georgetown University. His recent books and monographs include *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan* (NDU Press, 2022, lead editor), *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context* (NDU Press, 2021, lead editor) and *System Overload: Can China's Military Be Distracted in a War over Taiwan?* (NDU, 2020). Previously, he was a China analyst at CNA, a postdoctoral fellow at Princeton University and a predoctoral fellow at the Brookings Institution. He received his degrees from Princeton University, Oxford University and Columbia University.

Appendix

Table 1. Comparison of the 2009 and 2020 PAP Laws

	2009 PAP Law	2020 PAP Law
<i>Leadership of the PAP</i>	The People's Armed Police Force is led by the State Council and the Central Military Commission and implements a system that combines unified leadership and hierarchical command (Art. 3).	In performing tasks in peacetime, the People's Armed Police Force is organized and commanded by the Central Military Commission (Art. 10). In performing tasks in wartime, the People's Armed Police Force is commanded by the Central Military Commission or Theatre Command-organized command authorized by the Central Military Commission (Art. 10).
<i>Approval authorities</i>	The specific approval authority and procedures shall be stipulated by the State Council and the Central Military Commission (Art. 8).	The approval authority and procedures are stipulated by the Central Military Commission (Art. 12).
<i>Mobilization according to law</i>	No unit or individual may mobilize or use the People's Armed Police Force in violation of regulations. The People's Armed Police Force shall refuse to implement the transfer and use of the People's Armed Police Force in violation of regulations and immediately report to the higher authorities (Art. 8).	In mobilizing the People's Armed Police Force to perform tasks, adhere to the principles of employing troops in accordance with the law and strict examination and approval, and organize implementation in accordance with command relationships, duties and powers, and operating mechanisms (Art. 12).
<i>Professional guidance</i>	The target unit on duty may provide professional guidance to the People's Armed Police who are on duty in the unit (Art. 9).	The central state organs and local people's governments above the county level provide professional guidance for the People's Armed Police Force on duty, handling sudden social security incidents, preventing and handling terrorist activities, and [performing] emergency rescue work (Art. 14).
<i>Local deployments and coordination</i>	The People's Armed Police Force performs security tasks in accordance with the deployment of the public security organs of the people's government above the county level (Art. 10).	Central state agencies and local people's governments above the county level should establish mission requirements and work coordination mechanisms with the People's Armed Police Force (Art. 11). The target unit on duty may request the People's Armed Police Force responsible for the duty (Art. 11). Central state organs and local people's governments above the county level that need the assistance of the People's Armed Police Force for major security activities, handling of sudden social security incidents, prevention and handling of terrorist activities, emergency rescue, etc. shall make requests in accordance with relevant state regulations (Art. 11). In the event of major disasters, dangers, or violent terrorist incidents and other emergencies that seriously threaten public safety or the safety of citizens' personal and property, the People's Armed Police Force shall take actions in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Central Military Commission and report at the same time (Art. 12). The People's Armed Police Force participates in the command bodies established by the central state organs and local people's governments above the county level in accordance with the needs of the mission. Under the leadership of the command organization, organize and command in accordance with the relevant regulations of the Central Military Commission (Art. 13).