

# China Blog – September 2022

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## ‘Comprehensive National Security’ has become the CCP’s all-encompassing worldview and governance model

Thinktank Merics published a [report](#) entitled “‘Comprehensive National Security’ unleashed: How Xi’s approach shapes China’s policies at home and abroad” on 15 September 2022. The report reveals that, while countries around the world (even democracies) are re-defining and tightening national security, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has raised this whole concept to new heights with its “securitization of everything”.

The CCP’s traditional concept of national security, as followed by Mao Zedong, consisted of just three elements – political, territorial and military security. In contrast, Secretary General Xi’s comprehensive national security concept consists of not less than 16 different types of security. Three consequences of this focus on national security are listed below, the first of which may be the least surprising:

1. The ultimate goal is “to defend the CCP’s hold on power and political stability”, whereby the CCP and Chinese state are seen as one. This is fundamentally different to most of the national concepts adopted by other countries.
2. The frame of analysis is being increasingly narrowed down to perceived or real internal and external threats. However, if threats are detected everywhere, this leads to ever higher levels of paranoia.
3. As the number of perceived threats has been multiplying, so has the reaction against and adaptation to them. Threat recognition and adaptation has become a style of governance for the whole CCP system from the center down to the grassroots – even if it is only done to impress superiors and score points for promotion.

In one example of what preparedness at the grassroots level looks like, an article in the PRC Leadership Watch from 1 September 2022 gave the [example of Niangziguan](#), a town with 11,446 inhabitants, more than 200 miles southwest of Beijing. The town’s CCP Committee recently published a “Program for Resolutely Waging the Tough Battle to Prevent and Defuse Major Risks” and its goals (among others listed) are as follows:

*Prevent and crack down on “color revolutions”. Keep a close eye on major activities, sensitive points and hotspot; closely monitor new developments in disruption and destruction by hostile forces. ... Actively shoulder the mission of being the anti-terrorist “moat” around the capital and resolutely guard against the prospect of becoming a terrorist hideout, fundraising site, or transit point, or even a place where jihadi activities are carried out. ... Prevent and crack down on infiltration activities by overseas Catholic forces. Strengthen construction of Catholic patriotism.*

One important area where this new governance model plays out is at the level of national legislation. A [recent study](#) found that proposals for new laws linked to national security needed far less deliberation in the National People’s Congress and its Standing Committee than proposals for more general laws, such as the Property Law (Hsin Hsien Wang & Shan Yun Shi, Comprehensive law-based

governance in China? Legislating authoritarianism in the Xi Jinping era, *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 6 September 2022). In their concluding remarks, the authors found: “If we look at the institutional changes in China during the Xi era from the perspective of the relationship between the party and the government, the central and local levels, and the state and society, we can see that it is a process of power centralization from the government to the party, from the local to the central level, and from the society to the state.”

National security is seen by the CCP as being the responsibility of every citizen. As a result, it has become part and parcel of school and college curricula. As the Merics report states:

*To future-proof the party state against domestic resistance, the leadership places a strong focus on inoculating China’s next generation against harmful influences. A roadmap to integrate national security in curricula was released in 2020. It beefed up post-1989 patriotic education by establishing national security-related content as a gradable competency across different subject syllabi. From elementary school onwards, students should learn to place China’s interests above their own and to defend their country. University students should have fully internalized what comprehensive national security means to inspire self-motivated actions. The defensive reflexes this creates are already playing out in university campuses globally.*

One of the areas in society where this change of priorities is becoming increasingly evident is religion. As the report explains:

*Beijing sees individual identification with the party and country as fundamental to long-term security. Recent campaigns have focused on promoting a unified national identity (国家认同) and “correct” mainstream values. Xi has called for a comprehensive national security outlook in religious affairs to ensure that religious organs promote CCP core values and policies. Minority languages have been marginalized in public education and partly restricted from use online. All Chinese are meant to be “one heart and soul” under the banner of a Chinese nation (中华民族) and the leadership of the CCP. Those who resist may be subject to re-education ... .*

This is one of the reasons why surveillance in China is becoming ever more sophisticated and tighter, and it also explains why the very physical surveillance of grid management is so important. This also plays out in social media: As the report says, whereas in the early 2010s, public incidents and scandals were often followed by weeks of critical discussion, nowadays, online spaces are quickly censored and flooded with messages supporting the CCP.

The dangers of such a one-sided emphasis on reacting to perceived threats has not gone unnoticed by some experts within China. As the report says:

*Some of the longer-term dangers of Beijing’s current course have also been outlined by Tsinghua University professor Yan Xuetong. He fears the next generation of citizens and decision-makers is likely to be overconfident and stuck in a make-believe mindset about China’s ability to achieve its foreign policy*

*goals, raising the risk of misguided policy choices. An overconfident Generation Z in China, he argued, thinks that “only China is just and innocent, while other countries, especially Western countries, are evil.”*

However, it is not only free debate that is being stifled within China. Even contact from the outside world is under increasing surveillance and comes with considerable restrictions and risks. Despite all promises to the contrary, the very popular WeChat App recently made a telling announcement: Although it has produced a separate, international version of its software, this does not mean that social interaction with users (such as likes, comments and histories) is not being [shared](#) with the Chinese authorities (Radio Free Asia, 8 September 2022). This is seriously limiting communication with people inside China.