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of the Ministry of State Security
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Abstract

In 2018, China's premier intelligence agency initiated an unprecedented reorganisation of its secretive internal structure. The Ministry of State Security's new structure concentrates operational resources around key intelligence and security missions and shows how the MSS has expanded to tackle new priorities. One bureau points to a growth in MSS's overseas security work, such as protecting Belt and Road Initiative investments. A Political Security Protection Bureau has likely been established to counter threats to the CCP regime, laying the foundation for the MSS to become a major player in elite politics. A new bureau probably leads MSS use of data and artificial intelligence, operationalising the masses of data the MSS collects through hacking and surveillance. We also present new details and sources on the MSS's previous organisational structure, which was inaccurately or incompletely described in available literature.

0 Introduction

The Ministry of State Security (MSS) is China's premier civilian intelligence agency. It combines domestic and foreign missions. It uses law enforcement and surveillance powers for counterespionage work and countering political dissent, while also playing a role in countering organised crime and narcotics. It runs public education and outreach related to state security. It has an intelligence analysis mission too, including through the MSS bureau known as the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. Externally, the MSS collects intelligence through human sources, influences foreign elites, penetrates foreign governments and intelligence services and secures China's diplomatic missions. The MSS also has substantial cybersecurity and technical capabilities. Its provincial departments have earned notoriety for their cyberespionage operations over the past decade.

The MSS is organised into at least 20 numbered 'operational bureaus' (业务局) with distinct missions. These include bureaus for technology research, intelligence analysis and foreign intelligence collection. As is the case for other sensitive Chinese party-state agencies, only operational bureaus are given numbered designations, perhaps as a way of obscuring their activities.

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Although these numberings are somewhat arbitrary and can change with each MSS reorganisation, they are an important tool for researching bureaus. Publicly available references to MSS bureaus overwhelmingly use their numberings (e.g. 13th bureau), instead of descriptive, functional names (e.g. Counterespionage Bureau). Researching and analysing MSS structure without studying how bureau numbers have changed can obscure the MSS's reorganisations and lead to overlooking otherwise valuable sources.

The MSS's structure has changed numerous times in its existence. Founded in 1983, probably with no more than nine bureaus, the MSS has added at least eleven bureaus to its line-up since then.⁰ Substantial reorganisations have probably taken place several times (Section 2). These generally involve changes in the numberings and responsibilities of bureaus.

Similarly, the MSS has established and gradually centralised state security organisations across China's provinces. The first stage of this process took place between 1983 to 1995 when provincial state security departments were established.¹ In 2000, city-level state security bureaus were placed directly under their provincial counterparts, rather than reporting to city governments and party committees as other city-level party-state agencies do. This was taken to the next level in 2016, argues Edward Schwark, when the party likely made provincial state security departments directly subordinate to the MSS itself, minimising the role of provincial governments in overseeing the state security system.²

Reorganisations are interesting because they can provide insight on the priorities and intentions of party leaders. They can also be opportunities to purge or retire government officials. For example, the 2018 reversion of the Ministry of Public Security 1st Bureau's name to the 'Political Security Protection Bureau' was interpreted by Jichang Lulu and Filip Jirouš as 'reflect[ing] the higher CCP leadership's emphasis on political security as a principle guiding legal and security work'.³ The United Front Work Department's 2018 reorganisation was likewise a sign of the united front system's increased centralisation and focus on strengthening party control over diaspora and religious affairs work.⁴ The recent disbanding of the PLA Strategic Support Force, and creation of the Information Support Force, has attracted much attention and was interpreted by J. Michael Dahm as a response to corruption, bureaucratic infighting and poor operational effectiveness.⁵

Understanding MSS organisational change is especially hard. At least six distinct takes on the MSS's structure have been published by analysts over the past two decades.

⁰The earliest known description of MSS organisational structure appeared in a Taiwanese Central Police Academy book in 1988. It described nine numbered bureaus but its sourcing is unclear. 杜陵, 中共公安制度研究, 中央警官學校公共安全學系, 1988, pp. 208 sq.

¹Alex Joske, 'State security departments: The birth of China's nationwide state security system', *Deserepi* 0, 2023.

²Edward Schwark, 'The Power Vertical: Centralization in the PRC's State Security System', *China Brief* 24.22, 2024.

³Jichang Lulu, Filip Jirouš, 'Back to the Cheka: The Ministry of Public Security's political protection work', Sinopsis, 2022.

⁴Alex Joske, 'Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New structures for a new era of diaspora and religious affairs work', *China Brief* 19.9, 2019.

⁵J. Michael Dahm, 'A Disturbance in the Force: The Reorganization of People's Liberation Army Command and Elimination of China's Strategic Support Force', *China Brief* 24.9, 2024.

We are not aware of any published in recent years that describe its current structure.⁶ Although some of these charts have been extremely valuable, they contradict each other without presenting clear sourcing that could be used to resolve discrepancies. Likewise, no official organisational charts have surfaced. This means that observers of PRC intelligence activity have been left with conflicting and sometimes unreliable descriptions of the functions of several MSS units.

Section 1 of this paper describes new findings about the current MSS structure and its 2018 reorganisation. It also presents new research about pre-reorganisation bureaux to help determine the functions of recently attested bureaux. Section 2 then describes the evolution of the MSS's structure from its predecessor, the Central Investigation Department, covering the period between 1966 and the MSS's 2018 reorganisation.

1 The new organisational structure

The MSS reorganisation of late 2018 or 2019 led to the numberings and functions of operational bureaux changing. New bureaux were created, others significantly restructured, while some probably changed little beyond these superficial numberings. Due to the scarcity of publicly available information, we have only been able to offer informed discussion on seven MSS bureaux, responsible for domestic security, overseas security, technological research, counterespionage, counterintelligence, political security and surveillance technology.

The current structure of foreign intelligence, cyberespionage and cybersecurity work is not directly attested in public information, although they certainly continue to be high-priority missions for the MSS. Throughout its existence the MSS has wavered between organising foreign intelligence along functional or geographic lines, and it is unclear how this changed after 2018.⁷ MSS cybersecurity and cyberespionage operations also developed organically, and were spread across several bureaux in confusing and probably illogical ways.

Available information points to three key developments in the MSS since 2018:

- **The MSS has probably created a new bureau for political security work, targeting domestic and overseas dissidents, political rivals and corruption suspects.** Discussed in detail below, the bureau reflects the greater trust Xi Jinping places in the MSS, and probably its unprecedented alignment with the CCP General Secretary. This MSS bureau shares a name and probably much of its remit with the Ministry of Public Security's Political Protection Security Bureau. Its creation may have been motivated by distrust in the Ministry of Public Security, which saw its political security chief purged in 2020.
- **The MSS has likely expanded its technological research capabilities to better utilise big data and artificial intelligence.** A new bureau responsible for data

⁶郭瑞華, 中共對臺工作組織體系概論, 法務部調查局, 2004, p. 135; Peter Mattis and Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage: An Intelligence Primer*, Naval Institute Press, 2019, pp. 55 sq.; Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping*, Scribe, 2019, pp. 425 sq.; Xuezhi Guo, *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics*, CUP, 2012, p. 365; 翁衍慶, 中共情報組織與間諜活動, 新銳文創, 2018, pp. 109 sq.; 鄭宇欽, '中共國家安全部組織與運作模式之研究', Master's thesis, Tamkang University, 2005.

⁷Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau are exceptions in that they have likely been the responsibility of dedicated foreign intelligence bureaux since the 1980s, if not since the MSS's founding.

and artificial intelligence research was probably created in the past decade. This indicates the MSS is dedicating substantial resources to improving its ability to acquire and operationalise the masses of data available to the Chinese government. This likely includes surveillance data, domestic and foreign information acquired from Chinese technology giants, and hacked and leaked datasets.⁸

- **The MSS likely dedicates more resources to overseas security work, such as security for Belt and Road Initiative projects and state-owned enterprises operating abroad.** This reflects China’s expanding exposure to politically unstable countries and recognition of its increasing entanglement in international security matters. As we show below, what used to be a single bureau handling both domestic and overseas security work has likely been split in two, leading to the creation of a stand-alone Overseas Security Protection Bureau.

These findings are based on our analysis of five directly attested bureaus, as well as at least two whose existence we have inferred from available evidence. Although this is a highly incomplete picture of the MSS, understanding the specific missions of each bureau points to important changes in MSS responsibilities and priorities. We also hope analyzing and identifying these bureaus will support future work to confirm the functions of remaining unexamined bureaus, especially those tasked with foreign intelligence operations. To this end, Section 2 revisits the pre-reorganisation structure of the MSS, providing a baseline for research into its evolution.

The remainder of this section discusses the five directly attested bureaus. Some sources on these bureaus refer to them by number, others by name only. We have tried to connect these names to numbers and provide hypothetical names for others, based on their assessed functions and examples from other parts of the state security system.

2nd Bureau — Unknown law enforcement bureau, possibly social stability maintenance or political security

In 2021, the MSS 2nd Bureau participated in criminal law training. The source, a post on a Supreme People’s Procuratorate social media account, only says the MSS 2nd and 13th Bureaus participated in this training, with no further information about them. However, this strongly indicates the bureau has law enforcement powers.⁹ No further information is known about this bureau. Until 2018, this numbering was used by a MSS foreign intelligence bureau that almost certainly had no law enforcement remit. Only a handful of MSS bureaus have law enforcement powers, including the Counterespionage Bureau (now the 13th Bureau) and probably the old 17th Bureau (social stability maintenance).

One candidate for the 2nd Bureau’s identity is an MSS Political Security Protection Bureau, analogous to the Ministry of Public Security Political Security Protection Bureau. This unit was likely created in or after 2018, inferring from a ‘Political Security Protection Division’ (政治安全保卫处) attested in a provincial state secur-

⁸A job advertisement from a ‘bureau-level science and technology research public institution subordinate to an unspecified national ministry’ likely originates in the MSS. It describes the unit as researching big data and artificial intelligence from a location in Beijing’s Haidian District. The deliberately vague description of the unit and its parent agency are characteristic of a clandestine State Council agency such as the MSS. ‘国家某部委直属事业单位招聘宣讲会’, 武汉大学, 17 Dec. 2019.

⁹“很解渴”！原来你是这样的同堂培训，最高人民检察院，via Sohu, 21 July 2021.

ity department in 2023.¹⁰ The structures of provincial Chinese government agencies typically mirror those of their central counterparts, including in the state security system.

No such organisation was known to exist in the state security system, but its creation is consistent with the party's greater emphasis on political security. A recent MSS article emphasised the absolute centrality of political security to the concept of state security, thereby establishing it as the preeminent underpinning of the MSS's work:

*Political security directly relates to the safety of the regime and the survival of the political system. It is the most basic requirement of a nation and the foundation of its existence and development. Without political security, there is no point talking about state security.*¹¹

The Political Security Protection Bureau likely leads operations against threats to regime security such as dissident organisations and political rivals of the CCP leadership. It is probably also involved in attempts to harass and rendition dissidents and corruption suspects in foreign countries, such as the activities exemplified by 'Operation Fox Hunt'. However, the extent of its mandate and ability to operate outside of China's borders is unknown. Another possibility is that it is involved in counterespionage investigations involving CCP leaders or senior officials.

If confirmed, it would represent a major departure from previous assessments that the MSS plays only a minor role in CCP leadership struggles and factional battles.¹² Its public security counterpart has been heavily targeted in recent purges precisely because of its entanglement in elite politics as a 'power ministry'.¹³ Likewise, General Secretary Xi Jinping's apparent distrust of key MPS figures provides a rationale for creating a rival political security organisation in the MSS — led by a minister whose political career has been tied to Xi's.¹⁴

The MSS Political Security Protection Bureau probably took over responsibilities previously held by the counterespionage and social stability maintenance bureaus.

13th Bureau — Counterespionage Bureau

The new 13th Bureau is the Counterespionage Bureau (反间谍侦察局), responsible for counterespionage and counternarcotics work. Before 2018, this numbering was used by a technological research bureau that ran the China Information Technology Security Evaluation Center, a cybersecurity body, alongside several research institutes working in fields including biomedical research.¹⁵

¹⁰ '2019–2022 年度海南省维稳安保工作先进集体和先进个人拟表彰对象名单', 海南政法网, via 海南法治网, 17 Feb. 2023.

¹¹ 安平, '国家安全部: 政治安全是国家安全的根本, 必须把握“四大属性”', 国家安全部微信公号, via 澎湃, 15 Aug. 2023.

¹² Mattis & Brazil, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹³ William Zheng, 'Chinese 'political clique' leader Sun Lijun faces life in jail for corruption as law enforcement purge winds down', *South China Morning Post*, 23 Sep. 2022.

¹⁴ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, 'Counter-Espionage and State Security: The Changing Role of China's Ministry of State Security', *China Leadership Monitor*, 26 Feb. 2025.

¹⁵ Adam Kozy, 'Two Birds, One STONE PANDA', *Crowdstrike*, 30 Aug. 2018; '崔承彬', 沈阳药科大学校友会, 20 May 2017.

Its activities strongly indicate it is the successor to the old 8th Bureau, which a Taiwanese scholar described as responsible for ‘tracking, investigating and detaining foreign spies’:¹⁶

- In 2021, 13th Bureau officers participated in training on China’s *Criminal Procedure Law*, together with the 2nd Bureau, as discussed above. This shows it is one of the few MSS bureaus with law enforcement powers.¹⁷ MSS 8th Bureau officers previously undertook similar law enforcement training.¹⁸
- In 2020, a senior 13th Bureau official attended a counternarcotics event.¹⁹ The old 8th Bureau likewise led MSS contributions to national counternarcotics activities.²⁰
- At least one 13th Bureau official probably served in the old 8th Bureau.²¹

The Counterintelligence Bureau (反间谍情报局), which gathers intelligence on and has sought to recruit employees of international intelligence services, is probably now the 12th Bureau. Although not directly attested in public information, this speculation is based on the observation that MSS bureau numberings are often paired. For example, until 2018 the following bureaus had paired numberings: 1st and 2nd bureaus (non-official and official cover foreign intelligence collection), 3rd and 4th (Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), 7th and 8th (counterintelligence and counterespionage).

14th Bureau — Surveillance technology, forensics, and postal and telecommunications security

The 14th Bureau has taken on responsibilities from the old 9th Bureau, which covered surveillance technology, forensic technology, cybersecurity, postal and telecommunications security as well as cybersecurity. The MSS 14th Bureau participated in a July 2023 inspection of postal system security arrangements for major international athletic events.²²

Although postal security (e.g. inspecting letters and packages) is not a widely known function of the MSS, the ministry has long been active in this area.²³ Taiwanese Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau researcher Guo Ruihua described the old 9th Bureau as the MSS Technological Investigation Bureau (技术侦察局), responsible for postal inspection and telecommunications surveillance.²⁴ The old 9th bureau was also involved in criminal forensic work, participating in a national standards committee for forensic technology.²⁵

¹⁶ 郭瑞華, loc. cit.

¹⁷ “很解渴”...

¹⁸ ‘市检二分院检察官为国家安全部培训班授课’, 北京市人民检察院, 20 May 2015.

¹⁹ ‘国家禁毒委督导组深入双鸭山市督导检查’, 平安双鸭山, 13 Jan. 2020.

²⁰ “中生代”开始掌舵省级公安厅’, 法制周末, via 新浪新闻, 15 Jan. 2019.

²¹ ‘Another Examples, An supervisory group under... [sic]’, Dragon_eyears, via Twitter, 11 Oct. 2020.

²² ‘国家邮政局, 公安部, 国家安全部联合调研监督大运会、亚运会寄递安保工作’, 搜狐号政务, via Sohu, 22 Jul. 2023.

²³ For example, the MSS and other agencies jointly issued a directive in 1986 prohibiting non-government entities from offering express mail services. 中国外运四十年, ed. by 中国对外贸易运输总公司, 工人出版社, 1999, p. 205.

Early Ministry of Public Security mail inspection work, the predecessor to MSS postal surveillance, is discussed in Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao’s Secret Agents 1949-1967*, CUP, 2013, pp. 132-4.

²⁴ 郭瑞華, loc. cit.

²⁵ ‘第三届全国刑事技术标准化技术委员会 (SAC/TC179) 组成方案’, 2018, 国家标准化管理委员会.

The old 9th Bureau had a cybersecurity remit that has not previously been discussed in published analysis of the MSS. It probably oversaw the MSS's Nanjing Institute of Information Technology (南京信息技术研究院), which researches areas including surveillance technology and cybersecurity. Extrapolating from its technical surveillance role, 9th Bureau cybersecurity work probably included internet surveillance. A 9th Bureau officer also held an affiliation with the MSS's Nanjing Institute of Information Technology (originally the Jiangsu Public Security Science and Technology Research Institute),²⁶ where he specialised in cybersecurity research.²⁷ Similarly, a 9th bureau engineer was appointed as a government advisor on cybersecurity in 2018.²⁸ One source from 2013 even refers to a known 9th Bureau officer as working in the 'MSS Cybersecurity Bureau', although it is possible this is an unofficial name or a reference to a different MSS bureau.²⁹

We have not confirmed whether the current 14th Bureau carries out cybersecurity work, which could have been reorganised in 2018. The reorganisation could have provided an opportunity to structure key functions such as cybersecurity work more logically, concentrating it in dedicated bureaus. Before 2017, in addition to the old 9th Bureau, the 13th and 16th Bureaus also had notable cybersecurity roles and it is unclear how the MSS divided tasking between the three bureaus. However, it is not known where cybersecurity and cyberespionage capabilities sit in the new structure.

15th Bureau — Technical Protection and People's Defensive Line Bureau

The activities of the MSS 15th Bureau were an early indication of the 2018 reorganisation. The new 15th Bureau is responsible for protective security work and outreach to protect Chinese organisations from and raise awareness of foreign threats.³⁰ Before the reorganisation, this numbering was used by a Taiwan analysis bureau (operating outwardly as the Institute for Taiwan Studies in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences).

Although its name is not directly attested, the 15th Bureau is probably called the Technical Protection and People's Defensive Line Bureau (技术保卫和人民防线局). Since the end of 2018, technical protection and people's defensive line units have appeared across the provincial and local levels of the state security system, likely reflecting a similar reorganisation in the MSS.³¹

Although technical protection and 'the people's defensive line' sounds like an unnatural grouping of responsibilities, the two missions are essentially focused on outreach

²⁶Joske, 'State security departments...'

²⁷董新民, 尹芷仪, 郭晓博 & 高能, '网络基因图谱研究', 信息安全研究 2:9, 2016; '国家三网融合试点安全评估组', 江苏文明网, 2011 (page inaccessible).

²⁸'国家重点研发计划重点专项 2018 年度项目申报指南编制专家名单 (45 个专项)', 科塔学术, 26 Oct. 2018.

²⁹Wang Tongtong 王彤彤 was described in 2013 as deputy head of the MSS Cybersecurity Bureau and in 2017 as an MSS 9th Bureau deputy head. '北京天文馆 " 诗意星空 " 系列天文科普活动举办启动仪式', 北京天文馆, 24 Oct. 2013; '关于加快全国邮件快件实名收寄信息系统推广应用工作的实施方案', 曲靖市公安局.

³⁰尹章華, '媒體觀察系列 (272) – 兩岸密使與國安工作', 台灣法律網, 22 May 2003; Mattis & Brazil, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³¹'外国语学院举办 " 高校意识形态工作与国家安全 " 报告会', 河北北方学院, 27 Nov. 2018; '2020 年上海市高校国家安全教育教学能力竞赛在我校举办', 上海理工大学, 2020; '河南街道组织开展国家安全宣传教育活动', 琿春河南街办事处, via Sohu, 17 Apr. 2019; '省公安厅李波总队长为我校师生作 " 国家安全 " 主题讲座', 贵州城市职业学院, via WeChat, 14 Nov. 2019.

and protective security. Technical security is defined by one province's state security department as 'using state security examinations, regulations, technical means and other measures to prevent, stop and lawfully punish activities that harm the conduct of state security.'³² It therefore includes such tasks as advising on technical and policy measures to protect Chinese organisations' state secrets, and ensuring the security of technology and infrastructure in China through powers such as security evaluations and examinations of construction projects and foreign investments. The more 'technical' side of technical protection probably focuses on communications systems across China, including detecting and countering illegal broadcasts and unapproved satellite ground receiving stations.³³

Technical security therefore involves large amounts of outreach to Chinese companies and universities to advise on and inspect their security measures, and raise awareness about security threats. This means much of the MSS's technical protection mission involves building and liaising with the 'people's defensive line' — ordinary individuals and organisations that help identify, manage and alert the MSS to security issues.

The MSS 15th Bureau's responsibility for this type of work makes it one of the most visible parts of the MSS:

- In August 2019, a 15th Bureau official spoke at a national conference on state secrets protection work in state-owned enterprises.³⁴
- The 15th Bureau runs the Chinese government's online portal for state security-related construction approvals (e.g. assessing planned projects for risk based on their proximity to military facilities).³⁵
- The 15th Bureau runs education, propaganda and outreach related to state security as part of its effort to build a 'people's defensive line' in service of state security.³⁶ These propaganda efforts have markedly increased in intensity over the past decade.³⁷

Before the 2018 reorganisation, these tasks were the responsibility of the MSS 10th Bureau, which was called the External Security Protection Bureau (涉外安全保卫

³² Although relatively detailed, the description in this source comes from before the 2018 reorganisation. Provincial organisations also sometimes combine missions that are handled separately at the central level and it is possible that some aspects of technical protection described here are not handled by the 15th Bureau. For example, this provincial description of 'technical protection' work includes security evaluations of network products, which was almost certainly handled by a technology research and cybersecurity bureau in the MSS (the former 13th Bureau), and not the former 10th Bureau. 湖北省国家安全技术保卫办法, 湖北省人民政府, 湖北省人民政府令 393 号, 2017.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ '中轻联执行秘书长陈建国出席国资委 2019 年保密工作会议', 中国轻工业联合会, 28 Aug. 2019. The MSS officer, Zeng Qingshan 曾清山, may have been head of the Xi'an State Security Bureau in 2015. '西安市第十五届人民代表大会第四次会议列席人员名单', 西安市人民代表大会常务委员会, 26 Mar. 2015.

³⁵ <http://www.jsxk.gov.cn/> Earlier instances of the online portal described it as as run by the MSS, without reference to any specific bureau.

³⁶ '党、校办组织观看国家安全教育片', 西安交通大学, 19 Apr. 2019.

³⁷ Greitens, *op. cit.*

局).³⁸ For example, a representative of the old 10th bureau attended a similar conference on state secrets protection in state-owned enterprises in 2017.³⁹

However, the 15th Bureau probably focuses on domestic work, while overseas aspects of the former External Security Protection Bureau appear to have been expanded into a new, standalone bureau, which we describe below.

The 15th Bureau's work therefore probably includes the following tasks:

- Domestic education, outreach and liaison work. Likely an aspect of this, old 10th bureau university security work, liaising with security offices in Chinese universities (also a function of the Ministry of Public Security's 1st Bureau), is well attested.⁴⁰ The 10th Bureau also guided nationwide 'state security people's defensive line construction small groups' (国家安全人民防线建设小组), also simply known as 'state security small groups', through a unit called the State Security Small Groups Guidance Office (国家安全小组指导办公室).⁴¹ This office was likely responsible for coordinating state security education and outreach to government organisations, schools, social organisations and enterprises.
- Detection, monitoring and disruption of unauthorised broadcasts and other wireless transmissions.⁴²
- Security for major international events in China. For example, the old 10th Bureau oversaw security at the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games.⁴³
- Security advice for city planning organisations and construction approvals. The 10th Bureau was responsible for security reviews and inspections of 'foreign-related construction projects' such as international airports. It maintained a seat on the Capital Planning and Construction Commission (首都规划建设委员会).⁴⁴
- Security for Chinese leaders, probably including inspecting sites for technical threats such as eavesdropping equipment. The old 10th Bureau was responsible for protecting the party leadership when they attended the 1997 Hong Kong handover ceremony.⁴⁵
- Security for the PRC diplomatic presence and state-owned enterprises overseas, e.g. security measures for PRC government organisations and state-owned enterprises in Hong Kong.⁴⁶

Our description of the old 10th Bureau contradicts those in some secondary literature. Earlier accounts distinguished between the supposedly internal or domestically

³⁸This name and its association with the 10th Bureau are attested in 中国高等教育学会保卫学专业委员会会志 1991–2011, 武汉大学出版社, 2011, pp. 25, 29. Two less reliable sources give this name for the bureau too: '首都规划建设委员会成员名单', 搜狐焦点, 17 July 2006; '刘刚', 泰安市中小企业公共服务中心.

³⁹'中船重工军工重点型号安全保密专题会议在大船集团召开', 大船集团, via Sohu, 19 Aug. 2017.

⁴⁰中国高等..., p. 37.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 135.

⁴²Some aspects of this task might overlap with the MSS 14th Bureau's remit. The division of labour in this area is unclear. '湖北省国家安全...'

⁴³'上海世界特殊奥林匹克运动会组织委员会委员名单', 上海新闻, 9 Apr. 2007.

⁴⁴中国建设年鉴编委会中国建设年鉴 1999, 改革出版社, 1999 p. 332.; '首都规划建设委员会成员名单 (2004.9.13)', 搜狐焦点网, 4 Mar. 2005.

⁴⁵于洪葆, ed., 隐蔽战线写春秋, 时事出版社, vol. 2, p. 70.

⁴⁶'驻港机构和中资企业安全保卫工作会议组来我县参观考察', 中国婺源网, 13 Aug. 2010.

focused old 9th Bureau and the foreign-focused old 10th Bureau.⁴⁷ However, as we argued above, the 9th Bureau was primarily a surveillance technology bureau, and the old 10th Bureau had a significant internal/domestic remit.

Overseas Security Protection Bureau (16th Bureau?)

References to a post-2018 MSS Overseas Security Protection Bureau (海外安全保卫局) indicate this unit has taken up overseas aspects of the old 10th Bureau's work. The difference in name between this and the old 10th bureau ('external' (涉外) versus 'overseas' (海外)) implies a narrower remit covering activities outside China's borders. Based on conventions of giving related bureaus paired numberings, we speculate that the Overseas Security Protection Bureau is the MSS 16th Bureau.⁴⁸



Figure 0: Counterterrorism training for Chinese companies in 2018, co-organised by the MSS and delivered by the International Security Defensive College in Beijing.⁴⁹

This expansion of international security work will likely lead to an increase in the MSS's presence in China's diplomatic missions. The MSS will also likely seek to build closer relationships with Chinese companies operating abroad, providing them security advice while also gathering security intelligence from them.⁵⁰

The Overseas Security Protection Bureau is likely involved in the following types of work:

- Overseas security for SOEs. The bureau includes a 'State-owned enterprise division' (国企处) that provided overseas security advice to construction company China Railway Group Limited (中国中铁股份有限公司).⁵¹
- Security training for Chinese companies operating overseas. The bureau partnered with a private Chinese security college and the Ministry of Commerce to

⁴⁷ Guo, *loc. cit.*; Mattis & Brazil, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁸ For example, the old 1st and 2nd bureaus, and the old 7th and 8th bureaus.

⁴⁹ '博深集团阿治曼中国城受邀参加中国第一届对外投资合作安全培训', 阿基曼中国城, via WeChat, 3 Oct. 2018.

⁵⁰ Cf. Daria Impiombato, Bethany Allen, Nathan Attrill, 'Exclusive: Inside Beijing's app collecting information from Belt and Road companies', *The Strategist*, 27 Sep. 2024.

⁵¹ '中国中铁外事管理业务暨境外非生产性安全管理培训班在中铁六院集团举办', 中铁六院, via WeChat, 24 July 2019.

deliver counter-terrorism training to Chinese businesses in 2018, including one operating in the UAE (Figure 0).⁵²

- Security for Belt and Road Initiative projects.
- Diplomatic security and protecting Chinese delegations abroad.⁵³

Table 0: MSS bureaus before and after the 2018 reorganisation⁵⁴

No.	Role or name until 2018	Current role
1	Secret line operations (foreign intelligence primarily through non-official cover)	
2	Open line operations (foreign intelligence through government-affiliated cover such as media outlets, diplomatic missions and state-owned enterprises)	Unknown function involving law enforcement powers, such as political security or 'social stability maintenance'
3	HK and Macau operations	
4	Taiwan operations	
5	Analysis and Reporting Bureau (分析通报局)	
6	Science and Technology Intelligence Bureau (科技情报局, S&T intelligence collection)	
7	Counterintelligence Bureau (反间谍情报局)	
8	Counterespionage Bureau (反间谍侦察局, probably including counter narcotics and organised crime investigations)	
9	Technical Investigation Bureau (技术侦察局), ⁵⁵ responsible for surveillance technology, postal and telecommunications security/surveillance (probably oversees the Nanjing Institute of Information Technology)	
10	External Security Protection Bureau (涉外安全保卫局, domestic and overseas security work)	
11	Research Bureau (研究局), outwardly known as the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations	
12	Social investigation Bureau (社会调查局 or 社会联络局, foreign intelligence and elite political influence operations – historically through front organisations such as China International Culture Exchange Center and China Reform Forum)	Counterintelligence (speculative)
13	Science and Technology Bureau (科学技术局, technology research including offensive and defensive cyber through the China Information Security Evaluation Center and other research institutions)	Counterespionage Bureau (反间谍侦察局)

⁵²‘博深集团...’ For research on Chinese overseas security contractors, see Paul Natulya, ‘Chinese Security Contractors in Africa’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Aug. 2020.

⁵³Functions inferred from the legacy of the old 10th bureau.

⁵⁴Capitalised titles with Chinese characters are provided where we have assessed the likely official title of the bureau.

⁵⁵This naming for the unit is well attested at the provincial level (sometimes abbreviated to 技侦). For example, the Hunan State Security Department’s Technical Investigation General Brigade spied on social media accounts and email inboxes used by Chinese activist Peng Yuhua as part of its investigation of Peng and Taiwanese democracy activist Lee Ming-che. 被告人彭宇华刑事判决书

Table 0 (cont.): MSS bureaus before and after the 2018 reorganisation

No.	Role or name until 2018	Current role
14	Communications Bureau (通信局, cyphers and communications including diplomatic communications)	Surveillance technology, postal and telecommunications security (probably oversees the Nanjing Institute of Information Technology)
15	Taiwan research and analysis, probably also covering Hong Kong and Macau (outwardly known as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Taiwan Studies) ⁵⁶	Technical Protection and People's Defensive Line Bureau (技术保卫和人民防线局, state secrets protection, state security propaganda and education, people's defensive line, university security, security for major events)
16	Information Technology Bureau (信息技术局, internal computer networks, cybersecurity, information technology research, open-source intelligence, 'MSS Information Centre')	Overseas Security Protection Bureau (海外安全保卫局, overseas security such as diplomatic missions, delegations, state-owned enterprises, BRI projects, security training)
17	Social stability maintenance ⁵⁷	
18	USA operations	
19	Counterterrorism Bureau (反恐局)	
20	Unknown	

2 Old structures

One of the greatest challenges in understanding the current MSS organisational structure is the multitude of conflicting descriptions about its previous structures. Without an evidence-based description of older MSS structures, it is nearly impossible to grapple with its latest reorganisation. We have therefore prepared a brief overview of the evolution of the MSS, starting with the Central Investigation Department (CID, 中央调查部), then describing the MSS's initial structure in the 1980s, and finally explaining changes up to 2018.

The Central Investigation Department

Parts of the MSS's structure clearly trace back to its foreign intelligence predecessor: the CID. Disbanded and subsumed into the newly formed MSS in 1983, the department focused primarily on foreign intelligence work. Despite being China's first foreign intelligence agency, the CID has received little scholarly attention.⁵⁸ Very few official sources discuss the agency.

Helpfully, a memoir by former officers describes its organisational structure immediately prior to the Cultural Revolution (c. 1965), including the following numbered bureaus:

⁵⁶Guo Ruihua refers to this bureau as the Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau Research Bureau (台港澳研究局). 郭瑞華, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁷Countering organised crime is attested as a mission of Heilongjiang state security organs. Responsibility for this work in the MSS possibly fell under the former 17th bureau, based on its social stability mission. '黑龙江省人民政府关于表彰我省为北京奥运会残奥会安保工作做出突出贡献的先进集体和先进个人的决定', via 发搜, 7 Nov. 2008.

⁵⁸沈迈克 [Michael Schoenhals], '关于中国共产党中央调查部的历史考察', 当代中国史研究 17.2, 2010; 蔣華杰, '龍の眼からみた世界 — 公開情報の研究と中華人民共和国の外交政策決定 —', 社会システム研究 32, 2016. Ariane Knüsel also describes CID from the perspective of Swiss police archives — the CID was especially active in Switzerland in the 1950s and 60s: Ariane Knüsel, *China's European Headquarters: China and Switzerland during the Cold War*, CUP, 2022.

- 1st Bureau: Japan, Southeast Asia and South Korea
- 2nd Bureau: Europe, America and Australia
- 3rd Bureau (Communications Bureau, 通信局)⁵⁹: Wireless communications, telecommunications, certificates, cryptography, photography etc.⁶⁰
- 4th Bureau: Research using open-source materials (the predecessor to the MSS's China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations)
- 5th Bureau: Personnel matters (hiring, training, personnel files etc.)
- 6th Bureau: Administration and management (property management, finances etc.)
- 7th Bureau: West Asia and Africa
- 8th Bureau: Science and technology⁶¹
- 9th Bureau: Reporting (including four divisions mirroring the regions of the four foreign intelligence collection bureaus)
- 10th Bureau: Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan⁶²

The early MSS

The core functions of the CID's bureaus found their way into the MSS. However, the MSS mainly combined foreign intelligence collection into bureaus divided by method and cover rather than geography. The 1st Bureau used 'secret channels' — non-official cover, while the 2nd Bureau took responsibility for collection through various posts in the Chinese government and its affiliated entities (especially party-state newspapers such as the *Guangming Daily*). Only the 3rd Bureau, responsible for Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, had a specific geographic remit.⁶³ Taiwan functions of the 3rd Bureau were likely separated into a standalone Taiwan operations bureau — the 4th Bureau — at an unknown date.⁶⁴ Otherwise, the functions and numberings of these first three MSS bureaus largely stayed the same until 2018. It is also likely that an analysis and reporting bureau (分析通报局), handling evaluation and dissemination of intelligence reports from the state security system, was carried over from the CID to the MSS.⁶⁵

The MSS's domestic security and counterespionage remit added new units to the old CID structure. Four bureaus were responsible for a range of counterintelligence, counterespionage, surveillance and security tasks according to the earliest available account of the MSS's structure, a 1988 book written by Du Ling and published by Taiwan's police academy:⁶⁶

⁵⁹ 文登学人, 中国城市出版社, 1995, p. 536.

⁶⁰ The CID 3rd Bureau was the predecessor to the MSS 14th Bureau, which had very similar functions. 包国良, ed., 华士镇志, 方志出版社, 2009, p. 1149.

⁶¹ Probably covering both technology research and collection of intelligence on foreign technology.

⁶² Thanks to Matthew Brazil for pointing us to this source. 郝汀 & 章钟峨, 文化大革命中的中央调查部, self-published, 2013, pp. 11 sq. Much of the organisational structure described in the memoir is corroborated by other sources, such as biographical descriptions of officers.

⁶³ 杜陵, op. cit.

⁶⁴ '刺探法輪功資料 台商當共諜改判為 1 年 2 月', 自由時報, 30 Aug. 2023.

⁶⁵ However, this is not clearly attested in Du Ling's account, which appears to attribute this function to the 8th Bureau — the successor to the CID 4th Bureau (CICIR).

⁶⁶ A 1987 edition of the book may also discuss the MSS's structure but we were unable to access a copy.



Figure 1: CICIR Vice President Fu Mengzi 傅梦孜 speaking in his role as an MSS deputy bureau chief in 2013. The partially obscured text behind him describes him as 'deputy bureau chief of a ministry's research bureau'.⁶⁷

- 4th Bureau: Technological work, including technical surveillance of foreign missions
- 5th Bureau: 'Dispatching penetration agents abroad' — possibly referring to an early counterintelligence bureau
- 6th Bureau: Investigating and surveilling foreign spies
- 7th Bureau: Surveillance of foreign organisations in China, such as embassies
- 9th Bureau: Responsible for securing overseas diplomatic missions

The reliability of Du's descriptions is mixed, which is unsurprising given the MSS was only five years old at the time. It is also complicated by what was likely a reorganisation of the MSS around the late 1980s. Du only described nine numbered bureaus, but the MSS probably had 16 bureaus by 1989.⁶⁸ In Du's account, the 4th Bureau was the only technology-related bureau, responsible for technical surveillance work. This is supported by a 1987 document that indicates a technical focus for the 4th Bureau.⁶⁹ However, an MSS 12th Bureau responsible for technological research is attested in 1989 (probably later renumbered to become the pre-2018 13th Bureau).⁷⁰ An MSS Science and Technology Intelligence Bureau for collecting intelligence on foreign technology also existed in the 1980s, but does not appear in Du's description.⁷¹ Likewise, the CID had separate bureaus responsible for technological research and collection of scientific intelligence, so it is likely that these functions remained separate when the MSS was created.⁷²

⁶⁷ 傅梦孜: 明年或许是世界经济的拐点-新华网, 新华, 18 Dec. 2013 (source now inaccessible).

⁶⁸ See reference to the MSS 16th Bureau's existence in 1989 in '海南省纪委书记马勇霞 副书记 丁伯东、罗志军、刘容平简历', 中国经济网, 24 Apr. 2014.

⁶⁹ '中国系统工程学会团体会员单位首批名单', 系统工程理论与实践 7.3, 1987, p. 77.

⁷⁰ It is logical that when the Social Investigation Bureau was created at an unknown date as the 12th Bureau, the former 12th Bureau moved up in numbering to become the 13th Bureau best known for its involvement in cyber operations. 赵永良, ed., 无锡名人辞典, 南京大学出版社, 1989, p. 506.

⁷¹ 王时才, ed., 宁海现代人物志, 宁海档案局, 1998, p. 174.

⁷² 郝汀 & 章钟峨, loc. cit.

There is also some disagreement on the name and function of the 8th Bureau (later the 11th Bureau). Du described it as responsible for ‘coordination and exchange of intelligence’, including coordination with the International Liaison Department and Ministry of Public Security. Xuezhi Guo, drawing mainly on Taiwanese sources including Du, described the 11th Bureau as the ‘Intelligence Information Center’. However, sources clearly demonstrate that the 8th Bureau, and later 11th Bureau, were the numberings for the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR, 中国现代国际关系研究院, formerly 中国现代国际关系研究所) in the 1980s and since the ’90s, respectively.⁷³ Internally, the unit is known as the Research Bureau (Figure 1) — harking back to the Central Investigation Department where it specialised in open-source intelligence analysis for the CCP leadership.⁷⁴

An MSS bureau responsible for Taiwan analysis was likely spun out of CICIR in the 1980s. Its creation was necessitated in part by the realisation that CICIR, as an international relations institute, should not be involved in researching Taiwan — ostensibly a domestic Chinese matter. Thus the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Taiwan Studies was created in 1985 on the basis of a CICIR research team.⁷⁵ As noted above, this institute was known as the 15th Bureau prior to the 2018 reorganisation, and probably also covered Hong Kong and Macau analysis.⁷⁶

Notably, the MSS Social Investigation Bureau⁷⁷ (numbered as the 12th Bureau prior to 2018) is not attested during the 1980s. This unit was behind impressive foreign operations in the 1990s and 2000s, including the Katrina Leung case (a key FBI source in the California Chinese community who was recruited by the MSS) and elite influence operations targeting think tanks, China scholars, policymakers, media and business leaders in the United States, Japan, Australia and other countries.⁷⁸ Despite this fascinating history of foreign operations, the Social Investigation Bureau is often mischaracterised as having perhaps one of the least interesting remits: public opinion research inside China.⁷⁹ No primary sources have emerged in support of this claim.

Although some of the Social Investigation Bureau’s functions clearly existed during the earliest days of the MSS, the Bureau was probably formed around 1990 from parts of one or more foreign intelligence bureaus. Its main front organisation, the China International Culture Exchange Center, was founded in 1984. However, three facts point to the Bureau’s creation coming later. Firstly, it is not clearly attested in Du Ling’s 1988 description of the MSS. Secondly, its numbering was probably used by an unrelated science and technology bureau in the 1980s. Thirdly, many of its officers had backgrounds operating through official cover (i.e. former 2nd Bureau officers). The Social Investigation Bureau was therefore probably created around 1990 to help manage

⁷³ Wu Guoguang, former state media journalist and advisor to party leader Zhao Ziyang, described MSS 8th Bureau Deputy Division Head Zhou Rongkun 周荣坤 as an attendee at a roundtable during the 1980s. Zhou was outwardly known as a CICIR researcher. Furthermore, a 1994 bibliography produced by Xinhua News Agency describes CICIR’s *Guoji Ziliao Xinxi* 国际资料信息 journal as produced by the MSS 11th Bureau. 邢广程, 苏联高层次决策 70 年, 世界知识出版社, 1998, p. 5; 孙宝玉, ed., 世界新闻出版大典, 中国档案出版社, 1994, p. 866; 吳國光, 趙紫陽於政治改革, 太平洋世紀研究所, 1997, p. 307.

⁷⁴ ‘傅梦孜...’, 蔣華杰, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ 李家泉, 百年风雨话沧桑: 兼述我的“台湾缘”, 华艺出版社, 2012, as cited in ‘百年风雨话沧桑’, 李稼蓬, china.com.cn blog, 29 Sep. 2011.

⁷⁶ See note 56.

⁷⁷ Also known as the Social Liaison Bureau.

⁷⁸ Alex Joske, *Spies and Lies: How China’s Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World*, Hardie Grant, 2022.

⁷⁹ 郭瑞華, *op. cit.*, p. 134; 鄭宇欽, *op. cit.*; Anne-Marie Brady, ‘Party Faithful: How China spies — and how to resist’, *Australian Foreign Affairs* 9, 2020.

‘social liaisons’ with foreign elites and use domestic Chinese networks and PRC-based front organisations to serve as platforms for foreign intelligence operations. This description has some overlap with Du Ling’s description of the early 5th Bureau, which could have been a foundation for the Social Investigation Bureau’s creation together with the 2nd Bureau.⁸⁰

Developments until 2018

The MSS’s structure becomes clearer after the 1980s. Only a handful of MSS bureaus were created from the early 1990s onwards. The new bureaus reflected emerging priority areas for the party leadership: information systems and cybersecurity, social stability, counterterrorism and, finally, the United States, likely increasing the total number of MSS bureaus from 16 to 20:

- 16th Bureau: Information Technology Bureau (信息技术局).⁸¹ Also called the MSS Computer Management Bureau (计算机管理局) by Guo Ruihua, it focused on building and securing the MSS’s internal computer network and carrying out related information technology research. The bureau is also the source of the first known MSS cyber operation: a research institute under the 16th Bureau carried out a cyberattack targeting Falun Gong websites in 1999.⁸² Extensive personnel overlap between the 16th Bureau and the ‘MSS Information Centre’ indicates the latter was probably one of the bureau’s subordinate units.⁸³ The bureau also carried out open-source intelligence analysis, according to Guo.⁸⁴
- 17th Bureau: Social stability maintenance: ‘social stability maintenance’ work implies a remit for controlling politically incorrect social movements and suppressing unrest. The bureau probably administered the MSS Social Stability Maintenance Office (社会稳定办公室). At least one senior 17th Bureau leader had a background in the 8th Bureau (counterespionage).⁸⁵ The bureau represented the MSS in whole-of-government policy coordination on human genomic information, suggesting a remit for non-traditional threats to social stability.⁸⁶ The bureau probably also maintained some responsibility for managing MSS business activities from the earlier MSS enterprise bureau.⁸⁷

⁸⁰Joske, *op. cit.*

⁸¹‘背景资料：电信资费听证会代表名单’, 新浪网, 26 Feb. 2001.

⁸²Oscar S Cisneros, ‘ISPs Accuse China of Infowar’, *Wired*, 30 July 1999.

⁸³Biographical information about an MSS Information Centre leader shows he concurrently worked in the 16th Bureau. ‘参会代表’, 中国信息协会电子政务专业委员会, 2004; ‘海南省纪委书记...’

For examples of the work carried out by the 16th Bureau, see 邹璘, ed., 顺平现代人物志, 文物出版社, 1999, p. 534.

⁸⁴郭瑞華, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁸⁵Deng Yong 邓勇, MSS 17th Bureau deputy chief in 2006, was deputy head of the office immediately prior. Deng became head of the bureau later in 2006 before becoming head of the Xinjiang SSD in 2010. From 1991 to 2001, Deng worked in the MSS 8th Bureau, the counterespionage bureau. 四川年鉴 2017, 四川年鉴社, 2017, p. 356. On the 17th Bureau’s responsibility for social stability maintenance, see also ‘2006 年全国高校保卫工作培训班在青岛举办’, 海南大学保卫处, 15 Aug. 2006.

⁸⁶‘中国人类遗传资源管理办公室召开协调小组第二次工作会议’, 中国生物技术发展中心, 7 Sep. 2015.

⁸⁷In an unverified but apparently genuine confession video, former MSS Vice Minister Ma Jian, accused of corruption, claimed to have directed the 17th Bureau to unfreeze bank accounts for businessman Guo Wengui’s companies. ‘前国安部副部长马建认罪视频, 中国特产!’, 秦伟平频道《中国危机大逃亡》, via Youtube, 21 Apr. 2017,

– This numbering was previously used by the MSS enterprise or business bureau, responsible for managing MSS-controlled companies.⁸⁸ The business bureau was probably disbanded in the late 1990s as the party pushed the military and security apparatus to divest its interests in commercial operations. According to research by Michael S. Chase and James Mulvenon, the MSS was forced to close 112 of its companies, hand over 144 to other agencies of the party-state and ‘sever relationships with’ 106.⁸⁹

- 18th Bureau: US operations.⁹⁰
- 19th Bureau: Counterterrorism.⁹¹
- 20th Bureau: Unknown.⁹²

There is also evidence for what was probably a temporary reorganisation of MSS foreign intelligence bureaus along geographical lines under Minister of State Security Xu Yongyue (1998-2007). The 1996 edition of Guo Ruihua’s book does not describe geographically divided foreign intelligence bureaus. However, in 1999 and 2004, Guo described the first three MSS bureaus as responsible for intelligence collection on:

1. Western Europe, America and Oceania,
2. Eastern Europe and Russia, and
3. Asia and Africa.

We were only able to find one source referencing an MSS America-Europe Bureau (美欧局): a biographical entry on a former head of the bureau.⁹³ The entry implies the bureau existed as early as 1990, although such sources are often unreliable regarding the precise names of bureaus at different points in time. The names of units are often backdated for secrecy or simplicity’s sake, such as when former CID officers are only described as having worked in the MSS. The other geographical intelligence bureaus proposed by Guo also align with divisions used in the CID and other party-state agencies such as the International Liaison Department.⁹⁴

⁸⁸郭瑞華, *loc. cit.*; 鄭宇欽, *op. cit.*, p. 32. For examples of the 17th Bureau’s business activity, including operating several property and international trade companies, see 深圳市志改革开放卷, 方志出版社, 2014, p. 402; 郑治桐, ‘郑治桐宗亲赠送郑氏网《郑氏世系家谱》一本无价’, 郑氏网, via WeChat, 29 Nov. 2016. Apart from the change and expansion in the 17th Bureau’s functions and official directives that conflicted with the Bureau’s core purpose, biographical information about a likely 17th Bureau official fits this timeline. Chen Quansheng 陈全生 published a paper in 1996 using the ‘Ministry of State Security Enterprise Department’ (国家安全部企业司) as his affiliation but appeared to leave the ministry as a bureau-level official around 2000. 陈全生, ‘发展战略—企业集团的灵魂’, 经济工作通讯 17, 1996.

⁸⁹Michael S. Chase & James C. Mulvenon, ‘The Decommercialization of China’s Ministry of State Security’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 15.4, 2002.

⁹⁰Mattis and Brazil’s book is the only source on the 18th Bureau, describing it as the ‘US Operations Bureau for conducting and managing clandestine intelligence operations against the United States’. No further sources have emerged to contradict this information. Mattis & Brazil, *loc. cit.*

⁹¹洪建玲, ‘国家反恐办督导组深入陇川县调研检查十九大反恐维稳安保工作’, 陇川县公安局, via 德宏长安网, 21 Sep. 2017.

⁹²The MSS 20th Bureau is referenced in a government document probably dating to 2020. No definitive information about its founding date or role is publicly available. ‘2019–2020 年节约型公共机构示范单位名单’, 国家机关事务管理局.

⁹³王建华, ed., 武乡人物志, vol. 2, 政协山西省武乡县委员会, 2009, p. 38.

⁹⁴‘机构设置’, 中央对外联络部; 郝汀 & 章钟峨, *loc. cit.*

Finally, MSS units with administrative or corporate functions, in addition to the operations bureaus, are well attested during this period. It is unclear how they were affected by the 2018 reorganisation. At the highest level, the MSS maintains a political department (政治部), a general office (办公厅) and a discipline inspection and supervision group (纪检监察组). Individual administrative units sit under the political department and general office, including:

- Foreign Affairs Bureau (外事局), also known as International Cooperation Bureau (国际合作局)⁹⁵
- Propaganda and Education Bureau (宣传教育局)⁹⁶
 - Film Centre (影视中心)⁹⁷
- Personnel bureau (人事局)⁹⁸
- Audit Bureau (审计局)⁹⁹
- Retired Cadres Bureau (老干部局 or 离退休干部局)¹⁰⁰
- Intelligence History Research Division (情报史研究处)¹⁰¹
- Administration Bureau (行政管理局)¹⁰²
- Planning, Finance and Equipment Bureau (计财装备局)¹⁰³
- Organisation Services Bureau (机关服务局)¹⁰⁴
- Policy and Legal Bureau (政策法规局)¹⁰⁵

3 Conclusion: A more logical and efficient MSS organisational structure

Much remains unclear about the MSS's structure and functions. The numbers and specific tasks of most of its bureaus are unknown. We have assessed the current structure of the MSS, but expect that forthcoming information will enable other researchers to paint a more complete picture of the ministry. We hope this paper has contributed to clarifying the pre-2018 structure of the MSS by reviewing and expanding on a wide array of available literature.

⁹⁵‘刘暘被免去山西省副省长职务’, 联合早报, 27 Feb. 2024.

⁹⁶‘团结奋斗 开拓创新 在新征程上作出新业绩谱写新篇章——国家主席习近平在十四届全国人大一次会议闭幕会上重要讲话引发强烈反响’, 央视新闻, 15 Mar. 2023.

⁹⁷‘国家安全部影视中心专访《特工任务》导演’, 国家安全部微信公众号, via 北京日报, 20 Oct. 2023.

⁹⁸‘专业技术人才知识更新工程 2019 年高级研修项目计划’, 人力资源和社会保障, 27 Mar. 2019.

⁹⁹‘审计署表彰全国内部审计先进集体和先进工作者’, 审计署网站, via 中华人民共和国中央政府, 2 Sep. 2011.

¹⁰⁰‘历史名人’, 乳山市人民政府, p. 91.

¹⁰¹The division authored and sponsored intelligence histories such as the multivolume *Compendium of Historical Material on Chinese Communist Party Intelligence History* (中国共产党情报史资料汇编) and Fang Wen's *Sorge in China* (方文, 佐尔格在中国, 国家安全部办公厅情报史研究处, 1988).

¹⁰²‘国管局办公室关于成立中央国家机关社会事务管理协调小组的通知’, 国管办发〔2021〕9号, 国家机关事务管理局, 14 Apr. 2021.

¹⁰³‘中央政法委督察组深入陈仓区人民法院天王法庭调研’, 宝鸡市陈仓区人民法院, 27 Apr. 2011.

¹⁰⁴‘国务院机关事务管理局表彰中央国家机关财会工作先进集体和先进个人 (专题报道)’, 国家机关事务管理局, 1 Jan. 2000.

¹⁰⁵‘中央和国家机关工委关于表彰中央和国家机关创建模范机关标兵单位和先进单位的决定’, 旗帜网, via 人民网, 29 Jan. 2021.

Likewise, the party's leadership's precise motivations for the reorganisation can only be speculated upon. The MSS probably was not singled out as needing reforms. Few agencies were untouched by the party's wide-reaching organisational shifts in 2018.

Regardless, one consequence has likely been a more logical reassignment of tasks between bureaus that could improve the MSS's capability. Reducing friction and overlapping remit between bureaus also improves the MSS's ability to coordinate its activities, especially in concert with the broader state security system in key provinces and cities of China. Overseas protective security and domestic outreach have probably both been elevated as missions. The MSS's new political security mission also signals greater support for its work from the Chinese Communist Party leadership. Its effort to incorporate big data and artificial intelligence into its work will also require political capital to coordinate with other agencies and provincial state security units, which likely collect the majority of surveillance data and hacked information. As more sources become available, future research will likely be able to shed more light on how new missions and priorities manifest in the current MSS structure, and how they are reflected in its intelligence operations. The current structure of cyber and foreign intelligence work in the MSS remains unclear in publicly available information.

The units actually carrying out the bulk of state security operations — provincial state security agencies — are a key gap in this study that would help elucidate the MSS's organisational reform. The compressed and often simplified structures in China's provincial bureaucracy can shed light on how different types of work are conceived and grouped more broadly. We expect to see similar reforms of provincial agencies. Although these may be individually harder to observe through public information, the greater number of provincial state security agencies (one for each of China's 31 provincial jurisdictions) means far more information is available in total.

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