

Demobilizing the Stability-Maintenance Apparatus: Budgets, Files and Personnel

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Series: Security-Sector Transition & Rule-of-Law Safeguards — research papers accompanying [the Security-Sector Transition & Rule-of-Law Safeguards working blueprint](#). **Paper S3.**

1. The question

A democratic transition in the PRC (Mainland) inherits more than a police force and an army. It inherits a third structure: a Party-led “stability maintenance” system that coordinates courts, prosecutors, police, state security, paramilitary units, neighborhood grid workers and informal auxiliaries to prevent unrest before it happens. The question this paper asks is narrow and practical. Which parts of that system should be abolished outright, which functions should pass to ordinary institutions under published law, and in what order, so that public safety does not collapse while the coercive machinery of one-party rule is taken apart?

2. The hub position

The security-sector transition blueprint on this site sets the frame ([Security-Sector Transition & Rule-of-Law Safeguards](#)). Its goal is to place security institutions under public law, civilian budgets, courts and audit, rather than hand coercive power to a new party or faction. It treats renaming or loyalty declarations as no proof of change. It sets out a sequence of registration, freeze, interim control, vetting, reorganization, and then exit or lawful integration. It keeps defense, policing, intelligence and detention as separate instruments, and it rejects both collective guilt and blanket impunity. The companion dossier on the current system adds a specific recommendation: disband the stability-maintenance office network as a parallel command structure and move legitimate public-order work to police operating under published law ([Domestic Security & Stability Maintenance: The Weiwen Apparatus](#)). This paper applies that frame to the stability-maintenance system specifically.

3. Evidence and comparative options

3.1 What exists in the PRC (Mainland)

The command node is a Party body, not a state one. The 2019 Regulation on Political-Legal Work, issued by the CPC Central Committee, defines the “political-legal units” as the courts, procuratorates, public security, state security and judicial administration organs, and makes them Party-led forces (Art. 3) ([gov.cn text](#)). Party political-legal committees at county level and above are charged with assessing social stability, coordinating the prevention of conflicts that threaten stability, and coordinating comprehensive public-security management and stability work (Arts. 11–12). Under Art. 11, comprehensive-management centers at provincial down to township level work under committee guidance ([gov.cn text](#)).

The system was consolidated in 2018. The Party and state institutional reform plan of March 2018 abolished the central comprehensive social-security management commission and the central leading group on maintaining stability, and transferred both sets of duties to the Central Political-Legal Commission ([CAC republication of the Xinhua text](#)). Anti-cult work went to the same commission and the Ministry of Public Security. Abolishing an apparatus by folding it into a stronger one is a warning for any transition. The labels changed; the function moved upward.

The paramilitary arm sits outside state government. From 1 January 2018 the People’s Armed Police

came under the Central Committee and the Central Military Commission alone and was no longer listed under the State Council ([CASI translation of the announcement](#)). The 2018 plan moved border-defense and fire units out of the force and moved the coast guard into it ([CAC](#)). The armed police law revised on 20 June 2020 confirms command by the Central Committee and the Military Commission, with duties that include handling security emergencies and counter-terrorism ([China Daily](#)). Its size is not published. The last official figure, 660,000, appeared in the 2006 defense white paper ([white paper text, FAS mirror](#)), before the 2018 transfers changed the force's make-up. Current outside estimates differ: the IISS puts the force at about 500,000, while the 2023 US Defense Department report still repeats the 2006 figure ([War on the Rocks](#)).

The grid reaches every household. A 2021 Central Committee and State Council opinion on grassroots governance calls for comprehensive grids drawn on village and community boundaries, and for grassroots data to be collected once and used by many agencies ([12371.cn](#)). Minxin Pei traces grid management to a 2004 Beijing pilot, compiles provincial counts of hundreds of thousands of grid attendants, and documents that attendants track “key groups” including petitioners ([China Leadership Monitor](#)). In September 2021 the Central Political-Legal Commission's secretary-general urged higher video-surveillance coverage and finer grids in Guangdong ([CNA](#)).

Much of the coercion is outsourced. Lynette Ong's study of land seizures finds that local authorities rely on hired thugs and brokers. That keeps costs low and lets officials deny involvement, and her data link thugs to more injuries than uniformed forces ([Asia Policy roundtable](#)). Her later work finds only modest support for the claim that higher security spending buys fewer protests ([Munk School summary](#)).

The money is partly visible. The 2026 budget report gives central-level public-security spending of 243.848 billion yuan executed in 2025 and 258.269 billion yuan budgeted for 2026, up 5.9% ([gov.cn](#)). Most security spending is local, and the report gives no national public-security total. Jamestown's China Brief notes that 2011 was the last year both national military and public-security totals were published, and public security was the larger of the two ([Jamestown](#)).

3.2 Comparative cases

East Germany, 1989–1992. The government's attempt to rename the Ministry for State Security as an “Office for National Security” was opposed by citizens' rights activists ([Chronik der Wende](#)). When activists occupied Stasi offices, the council of ministers had to create a committee to dissolve the ministry. On 15 January 1990 crowds entered the Berlin headquarters. That day officials disclosed 85,000 full-time staff and 109,000 informers. In other cities, citizens secured files ([GHDI](#)). The Stasi Records Act came into force on 29 December 1991, and the first citizens, researchers and journalists could inspect files on 2 January 1992 ([Bundesarchiv](#)). Lessons: refuse renaming, secure files at once, and give victims access by statute.

ROC (Taiwan), 1987–2000. Martial law was lifted on 15 July 1987. On 10 April 1989 the Ministry of National Defense cut Garrison Command units, abolishing the political-warfare division that handled publication censorship and seven port inspection offices. After martial law ended, coastal patrol passed to the police, who lacked the staff for it. In May 1990 President Lee Teng-hui announced that the mobilization period would end within a year and that the Garrison Command would have to go with it ([China Times](#)). The command was abolished in August 1992. A combined Military District and Coast Guard Command took over its coastal duties. The two roles were separated when a civilian Coast Guard Administration was set up under the 2000 coast guard law ([Ministry of National Defense, Ching Shi magazine](#)). Lesson: unbundle the functions, give each a lawful home, and let some functions simply end. Expect the hand-over to take years.

Romania, 1989–2022. The Department of State Security was abolished by Decree No. 33 of 30 December 1989, issued by the Council of the National Salvation Front and published in Monitorul Oficial No. 8 of 31 December 1989 ([decree record](#)). The domestic intelligence service was set up in March 1990 and given a statute only in 1992 ([SRI](#)). The records agency founded in 1999 began receiving files in 2001. The last major tranche of 49,000 files came only in 2022, and some material is still unlocated ([RFE/RL](#)).

Lesson: if successor agencies keep custody of the archive, disclosure takes decades.

Indonesia, 1999–2002. Presidential Instruction No. 2 of 1 April 1999 began separating the police from the armed forces in stages, but it still left the police under the Department of Defense and Security (peraturan.go.id). The People’s Consultative Assembly then adopted Decree VI/MPR/2000 on separating the military and the police, and Decree VII/MPR/2000 on their respective roles. Law No. 2 of 2002, enacted on 8 January 2002, cites both decrees and places the police under the President (Art. 8) ([Law 2/2002 text](#)). Within a few years defense officials called the line between internal and external security “wrong” and floated a larger internal role for the military ([Kompas via Indoleft](#)). Lesson: separation must be written into law, with clear limits on when soldiers may act at home.

4. Recommended design

1. **Day-one freeze.** On assuming authority, the interim government orders every political-legal committee, comprehensive-management center, grid office and armed-police unit to stop destroying, moving or altering records. Custody of those records passes to an independent archive authority.
2. **Abolition, not renaming.** A statute dissolves the Party political-legal committee system and its comprehensive-management centers at every level. No successor body may inherit their coordinating mandate. Courts and prosecutors answer only to law; police answer to elected government.
3. **Function-by-function disposition.** A public schedule lists each function the system performs and assigns one outcome: transfer to a named civilian agency under statute, or abolition. Petitioner monitoring, “key group” tracking and pre-emptive detention are abolished.
4. **Armed police separated from the military.** Command passes from the Military Commission to a civilian interior ministry, under a statute that defines duties and use of force. The coast guard becomes a civilian maritime agency. Any domestic use of the armed forces requires a published legislative authorization with a time limit.
5. **Grid demobilized.** Grid attendants’ surveillance and reporting duties end at once. Their genuine service tasks, such as elderly care referrals and disaster notices, pass to elected local governments. Grid databases are frozen and archived, not reused.
6. **Auxiliaries disbanded or regulated.** Any person or contractor using coercion for an authority needs statutory authority and must wear identification. Hiring thugs or brokers to coerce residents is a criminal offense for the official who hires them.
7. **Open budgets.** All public-security spending, central and local, is published by function and audited, and transfers from enterprises to security bodies are prohibited.
8. **Personnel by function, not by unit.** Abolishing a body does not decide the fate of its staff. Personnel move to the conduct-based vetting procedure in the companion paper on vetting. Officers in abolished functions get reassignment, severance or retraining, not automatic dismissal. Credible evidence of serious abuse goes to independent prosecution.
9. **Victims’ access.** Within one year, anyone may read their own file, under a records statute modelled on the German approach.

5. Open questions and risks

- **Security vacuum.** Fast abolition could leave places without functioning public order. Transfer schedules need interim police coverage, and the ROC (Taiwan) model of splitting functions over several years may fit better than a single act.
- **Hidden networks.** Romania shows that successor agencies can quietly keep files and staff. External audit and public registers are the main defence.
- **Scale and data.** No reliable national count of grid workers, auxiliaries or armed police is public, and the national security budget is not fully published. All three must be established before demobilization can be costed.
- **Labor transition.** Hundreds of thousands of part-time grid staff will need retraining or severance; the cost is unknown.

- **Mission creep.** Indonesia shows militaries can reclaim internal roles. The statutory limits in provision 4 need judicial enforcement.
- **Data destruction versus privacy.** Archives serve victims but also hold intimate data on millions of people; access rules must balance both.

6. Cross-links

- Hub: [Security-Sector Transition & Rule-of-Law Safeguards](#)
- Current-system dossiers: [Domestic Security & Stability Maintenance: The Weiwen Apparatus](#); [Command & Control: The PLA, PAP, Police & Intelligence](#)
- Model law: [Seven-Law Transition Package](#) (L02 security-sector transition; L04 archives, truth and institutional vetting)
- Related: [Transition Readiness Methodology](#); [Constitution, Law & Justice](#); [A Professional Civil Service, Not a Faction's Staff](#)
- Companion papers in this series: S1 Civilian Command From Day One; S2 Vetting Without Purge; S4 Intelligence Oversight . S3 covers the abolition of institutions and functions; who may keep serving is covered in S2, interim command in S1, and the surveillance and intelligence services in S4.

In this series: [Civilian Command From Day One](#) · [Vetting Without Purge](#) · [Intelligence Oversight](#).

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