INSIGHTBRIDGE INTELLIGENCE

The Return of Order: When “Request and Report” Meets the “National Team”

A commentary on the global centralization cycle behind China’s high-density purge

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I. Someone Falls Every Day, but This Is Not Just Anti-Corruption

In early November 2026, Wang Ning, a 71-year-old retired general and former commander of the People's Armed Police, was stripped of his seat on the National Committee of the CPPCC. Days earlier, the Fifth Plenum of the 20th Central Committee had closed after removing 34 full and alternate members in one stroke and elevating Zhang Shengmin, a career disciplinary officer, to the Politburo. Rewind further: on January 24 the Defense Ministry announced that Central Military Commission vice chairman Zhang Youxia was under investigation; before him, He Weidong, Miao Hua, Li Shangfu and Liu Zhenli had all been removed. A seven-man CMC now effectively runs on two.

The first reflex abroad is to call this "anti-corruption." The second is to call it a "pre-21st Party Congress reshuffle." Both are correct, and both stop at the surface. The real question is why a regime that has already waged anti-corruption for thirteen years still needs, on the eve of a leadership transition, another round of this density, at this level, with investigations reaching back ten and fifteen years.

There is only one answer: the apex of power has run out of patience with the bureaucracy's "soft resistance."

Soft resistance is not open dissent. It is absolute loyalty in word and total flatlining in deed. When the center demands risk control, local officials shut everything down "one-size-fits-all." When the center demands implementation, they turn procedure into a labyrinth in which no problem has an owner. This is malicious compliance: procedural perfection masking operational paralysis, incompetent obedience substituting for effective execution. To the top decision-maker it is more dangerous than graft. Corruption steals resources; soft resistance steals the executive capacity of the state itself.

Hence the blade cuts three groups at once: serving officers, retired officers, and the "chief secretaries" and defense-industry executives who orbit the core. Retirement is no longer a safe harbor; four stars are no longer a talisman. This is not pest control. It is the forcible demolition of every hilltop and clique capable of "independent judgment," turning the rule that major matters must be requested first, executed after, and decided at the center from a paper regulation into muscle memory for every official above bureau level.

The irony is that under this pressure the Request and Report system has become political insurance for officials: secure the approval before acting, so that success is "resolute execution" and failure is collectively endorsed. Its real effect is not to make bureaucrats braver but to make them controllable. And for the top, controllability is precisely the scarcest commodity right now.

II. Don't Laugh Too Soon: The West Is Walking the Same Road

Read this storm only as "Chinese characteristics" and you miss the larger picture.

Look across the Pacific. Polarization in the U.S. Congress has slid from inefficiency into decision paralysis; European governments fragment and shorten their horizons in the face of debt, migration and industrial hollowing-out. Voter disillusionment with traditional elites converts directly into a hunger for a strongman who can "cut through

the noise." Donald Trump's drive to centralize executive power in the name of purging the "Deep State," reviving Schedule F and pulling the civil service back into the president's grip, is structurally isomorphic to Request and Report: in both cases, supreme power forcibly corrects a professional bureaucracy that will not obey.

The economic turn is even more complete. Adam Smith's Invisible Hand maximizes efficiency in times of peace and prosperity; in today's overlap of geopolitical tension, New Cold War shadows and economic downturn, security has thoroughly overridden efficiency. So the CHIPS and Science Act not only hands Intel direct grants and defense contracts but explores federal equity; the White House signs an executive order to build a U.S. sovereign wealth fund while Congress advances H.R. 3116, the American Sovereign Wealth Fund Exploration Act; the European Union loosens state-aid rules through CISAF to counter foreign subsidies with one hand and raises a compliance wall with the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism with the other.

This is not fine-tuning of the free market. It is the full restoration of neo-mercantilism. Anyone who still believes "government should exit the market" is reading last cycle's textbook.

III. The Endgame for Tech Giants: Total National-Teamization

Where political centralization and economic intervention intersect is high technology, above all artificial intelligence.

Semiconductors, artificial general intelligence and advanced algorithms are now treated by major governments as the nuclear weapons of the new era. No one lets private capital run nuclear weapons for profit maximization; AI is receiving the same treatment.

In the United States, NVIDIA is among the most valuable listed companies on earth, yet who may and may not buy its A100, H100 and B200 chips is decided by the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security, not by its board. In China, Huawei has been pushed to the front line against the blockade; DeepSeek, a private dark horse that stunned the world overnight, was absorbed at speed into the "core national team" of national compute scheduling, policy backing and security oversight.

DeepSeek matters for another reason. Using fine-grained Mixture-of-Experts and sparse attention, it drove training and inference costs to a fraction of its Western peers; on aggregation platforms such as OpenRouter its API sits at 0.20 to 0.27 dollars per million input tokens, a 90 to 95 percent discount to Western closed-source frontier models,

puncturing the narrative that "compute is the moat." Washington's response has not been price competition but a discussion of placing open-weight models on administrative blacklists. In other words, when market competition turns against it, even the most market-faithful nation switches instantly to administrative tools.

Two models, the American "private megacap plus bureaucratic bans" and the Chinese "state-coordinated ecosystem," take different paths to the same destination: technology companies are no longer commercially neutral entities but instruments of interstate competition.

IV. The Bill: Who Pays for "Order"

Political commentary should not only speak of inevitability; it must also speak of cost.

Supply-chain de-risking and multi-shoring are systematically consuming corporate profit. Systemic disruptions erase 44 to 45 percent of one year's EBITDA every decade; by the end of 2026, 73 percent of supply-chain leaders are expected to hit the "tariff absorption wall" beyond which costs can no longer be internalized; localized disruptions cost firms roughly 1.5 million dollars a day; multi-shoring compliance procurement runs 15 to 20 percent higher on average. These numbers mean one thing: the efficiency dividend optimized over thirty years of globalization is being clawed back, line by line, in the name of security.

For China there is a second layer of cost. When the senior command structure develops a "four-star gap" and lieutenant generals are promoted early into theater and service commands, when every official's first instinct is "request first" rather than "solve first," the controllability of the state machine rises but its response speed and grassroots initiative inevitably fall. Request and Report can eliminate soft resistance; it cannot eliminate its root, the gross asymmetry between risk and responsibility.

V. The New Normal: Strong Center, Big Government, National Team

Assemble the fragments and the picture is clear. The world has entered a "winter cycle" of intensifying geopolitical conflict and zero-sum resource competition. When survival pressure eclipses the peace dividend, great powers of every ideology make the same choice: consolidate power inward to break bureaucratic inertia, and deploy the state apparatus outward to escort strategic enterprises.

Incompetent obedience is not execution, and untamed growth is no longer an economic shortcut. The iron rule of Request and Report inside the bureaucracy and the

reality of multinational tech firms strapped to the national chariot are two faces of one coin.

The Invisible Hand has left the stage. At the helm now is the will of the state. It may not be the world we prefer, but it is the world we must see clearly.

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