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ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S 19TH PARTY CONGRESS

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Already holding over fourteen formal positions -- more than any other CCP leader so far -- CCP CC General Secretary Xi Jinping has, as anticipated, emerged considerably stronger from this Congress. By skilful use of the sustained anti-corruption campaign he has eliminated opposition in the Party and military and drastically reduced the influence wielded by his predecessor once removed, Jiang Zemin. In September 2017, China's official media publicised that more than 176 CCP cadres equivalent to the rank of central Vice Minister and above had been dismissed and arrested for corruption and that more than 14,000 officers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had been similarly dismissed. At least 120 officers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of and above the rank of Major General have been dismissed and retired.

Just weeks before the Congress, Xi Jinping publicly demonstrated his authority by arresting two top Generals (Fang Fengui and Zhang Yang), appointing 20 General Officers to command thirteen new Group Armies and promoting close associates to head the PLA Army (ground forces) and PLA Air Force. In a rare move, the names of thirteen delegates selected by Chongqing Municipality were deleted reducing the total number of delegates to 2287. A couple of days before commencement of the Congress another 7 were 'disqualified'. Politburo (PB) member and Chongqing Party Secretary Sun Zhengcai, viewed a likely candidate for the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), was also suddenly dismissed on charges of graft. He had been admonished in February for not doing enough to eliminate the influence of imprisoned former PB member Bo Xilai.

Xi Jinping had also been projecting himself since November 2012. The People's Daily, for example, during Jiang Zemin's tenure used to publish approximately 3,000 stories per year mentioning him and during Hu Jintao's term it published 2,000 each year mentioning Hu Jintao. In stark contrast, the People's Daily already publishes 5,000 stories each year mentioning Xi Jinping.

A major highlight of the week long (October 18-24, 2017) 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was held in Beijing, was its recognition of Xi Jinping's

contribution to Chinese communist ideology. The Congress unanimously approved its incorporation into the Party Constitution as 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era'. He is the first CCP leader to have his contribution, attached to his name, enshrined in the Party Constitution while still alive. This places it next in heft to those of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, especially with the Chinese media already having begun to headline it as "Xi Jinping Thought"!

Xi Jinping's ambition to be included in the pantheon of Chinese communist revolutionary thinkers was glimpsed early in June 2014 when the Party theoretical fortnightly Qiu Shi (Seeking Truth) described him as "one of China's greatest communist leaders" who had put forward "new thinking, new views and new conclusions". The public campaign to promote inclusion of Xi Jinping's thinking in the Party Constitution seriously kicked off in June 2017. The social media account of the overseas edition of the CCP's official mouthpiece People's Daily had then revealed that the Director of the CCP CC General Office Li Zhanshu had announced in an internal speech in February that President Xi Jinping's political philosophy was "basically complete." This was followed by a series of speeches eulogising Xi Jinping's political wisdom. In the weeks leading to the 19th Party Congress and between August 7 and September 18, 2017, Party Secretaries of thirty one provinces and autonomous regions wrote signed articles in the official CCP newspaper 'People's Daily'.

The approval by the 19th Party Congress to the appointment of many Xi Jinping loyalists, who now constitute the majority of the membership of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), Politburo (PB), CCP Central Committee (CC)'s Secretariat and the Central Military Commission (CMC), underscores the unmistakable -- and anticipated -- enhancement of Xi Jinping's authority and influence. Pertinent in this context are the revelations by China's official media in the weeks before the 19th Party Congress of the successes achieved by the campaign against corruption and, on the sidelines of the Congress on October 20, by Liu Shiyu, Chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, who said "Xi Jinping had saved socialism by bringing down high-ranking officials who intended to "usurp the party leadership and seize state power" and described "Xi Jinping as a saviour of the Communist Party". Liu Shiyu has since been promoted to the CCP CC!

Interesting are the affiliations of the new leaders appointed to the PBSC, whose number remains at seven. The composition of the new PBSC shows that while Xi Jinping has followed the Party's informal rules and convention regarding retirement age of senior echelon cadres, he has avoided inducting younger cadres who could be potential successors in the PBSC. The field for advancement to the next PBSC and as successors to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang have, therefore, been left wide open for the younger cadres now in the PB. The field is open too for Xi Jinping to continue in office as, which some of his acolytes have been saying since 2013, China enters a new thirty year era like those of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping earlier!

The new Politburo, like the previous, has 25 members. Apart from the seven PBSC members, among the remaining 17 PB members also Xi Jinping has a clear majority. At least 12 of them

are long-time Xi Jinping loyalists not including the two Vice Chairmen of the Central Military Commission (CMC) who are also very close and long time associates of Xi Jinping. Some of the PB members are poised to take over as heads of Central Party organisations. They all owe their rise to him.

Equally important is the CCP CC Secretariat, which has in the past five years under Xi Jinping become a powerful body. It reports directly to Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping has packed the important new 7-member CCP CC Secretariat with loyalists and Wang Huning is its senior-most member. The previous 18th CCP CC Secretariat was headed by Liu Yunshan who also, like Wang Huning is now, was in charge of ideology, the propaganda apparatus and Party organisation. Three of the Secretariat's members are persons with a background in security or the military namely, Yang Xiaodu, Guo Shengkun and Huang Kunming. The indication is that Party controls on these sectors will continue to become progressively tougher.

At least two members of the new CCP CC Secretariat have a background in Tibet affairs. In addition to Wang Huning, who has in the past been a member of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) delegations to the National People's Congress (NPC), these are Yang Xiaodu, a 'sent down youth in the Cultural Revolution' and till recently Minister of Supervision who served in the TAR from 1976-2001, and Guo Shengkun who as the Minister of Public Security (MPS) attended meetings of the Leading Small Work Group on Tibet. Huang Kunming, another member of the Secretariat has served in the PLA. As anticipated, TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie has been promoted to the new 19th CC as a Full member. In addition, this time there are two ethnic Tibetans, Qi Zhala (Choedak) and Luosang Jiangcun (Lobsang Gyaltzen), as Full members of the CC, or one more than in the previous CC and one, Norbu Dhondup, as an Alternate member of the CC. Sun Chunlan (f) who heads the CCP CC United Front Work Department (UFWD) and handles Tibet affairs, continues as the solitary woman in the PB despite being 67 years of age which actually puts her in the retirement zone. Interestingly Zhang Qingli, who was born in 1951 and earned a reputation as a hard-line TAR Party Secretary for his derogatory comments about the Dalai Lama, continues as a Full member of the 19th CC. Zhang Yijiong, present Executive Deputy Head of the UFWD and Vice Minister who on the sidelines of the 19th Party Congress outlined China's new strong policy towards the Dalai Lama, has been promoted from alternate member of the 18th CC to Full member of the 19th CC. All of them will have a strong voice in formulation of Tibet policy.

The new CMC consists of military officials who are all solid supporters of Xi Jinping. The composition and size of the new Central Military Commission (CMC) has also changed. It for the present comprises only four members and does not include the heads of the different services like the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), PLA Navy (PLAN) etc. The two CMC Vice Chairmen, former PLAAF Commander Xu Qiliang and PLA General Zhang Youxia, are both 'princelings' with long-time association with Xi Jinping. The new CMC Vice Chairman, Zhang Youxia's father Zhang Zongxun fought alongside Xi Jinping's father and they were called 'partners in blood'. Zhang Youxia has fought in the Sino-Vietnam war in 1979. The presence of Xu Qiliang,

Zhang Youxia and PLA Rocket Force Commander Wei Fenghe in the CMC point to an emphasis on the development and acquisition of modern, advanced defence technology. The induction of General Li Zuocheng, head of the Joint Staff Department under the CMC, and Lt. General Zhang Shengmin, Secretary of the PLA Discipline Inspection Commission, indicate that Xi Jinping will maintain the stress on a 'clean' and corruption free armed forces. Zhang Shengmin, incidentally, previously served in the 52th, 55th and 56th Bases of the Second Artillery in the Lanzhou Military Region and was Political Commissar of the Second Artillery Command College between 2012 and 2013. General Miao Hua as head of the Political Work department under the CMC will further Xi Jinping's agenda of expanding Party control and supervision over China's armed forces ensuring that the personnel are 'red and expert'.

The new appointments in the CCP's top bodies will allow Xi Jinping to pursue his ambitious agenda with few constraints. He will be free of any restraints in pursuing realisation of the "Two Hundreds" namely, the 'China Dream' (by 2021 which marks the CCP's centenary) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and making China an advanced developed nation (by 2049, or the hundredth year of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC)). It additionally leaves open the possibility of him extending his term till nearly 2049.

There were some important additional highlights of the 19th Party Congress. The Party, China and Army were mentioned often in Xi Jinping's Work Report along with a specific reference to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Less mentioned were the economy, reform and development. Xi Jinping for the first time made a direct linkage between the completion of China's second and final stage of development in 2035 and the PLA becoming a world class fighting force.

There was emphasis on the PLA with the term 'army' mentioned more than double the number of times than in the Work Reports presented at the 17th and 18th Congresses. It was mentioned 86 times in Xi Jinping's Work Report to the 19th Party Congress and 49 and 54 times in the Work Reports presented at the 18th and 17th Party Congresses respectively. Xi Jinping announced that the army's focus will be on realisation of the 'Chinese Dream' for which it must develop "a new military strategy under the new situation". National defense and military modernization will be promoted. Clarifying that by 2020, mechanization will be basically achieved and that the modernization of national defense and armed forces should be basically completed by 2035, Xi Jinping said that "IT has come a long way and strategic capabilities have seen a big improvement." He underscored technology as the PLA's "core combat capability". Xi Jinping asserted that the goal is to make the PLA a "world class force" that "can fight and win" by 2050. This timeline coincides with realisation of the BRI and China becoming a nation with "pioneering global influence". Xi Jinping also pointedly described the PLA as a "people's army".

The references to Hongkong, Macau and Taiwan were uncompromising with a strong suggestion of limits imposed on Taiwan, Hongkong and Macau. With regard to Taiwan, Xi

Jinping said “we have the resolve, the confidence and the ability to defeat separatist attempts for “Taiwan independence” in any form. We will never allow anyone, any organisation or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China”. He asserted that the CCP “stands firm in safeguarding China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will never allow the historical tragedy of national division to repeat itself”.

There was pronounced emphasis in the Work Report on “the Party exercising leadership over all areas of endeavour in every part of the country”, clearly indicating that Party controls will be expanded and ideology will remain predominant. Xi Jinping emphasised that “sweeping efforts” had been made to “strengthen Party leadership and Party building” while dismissing any notion of copying “western style democracy”. There were 331 references to the ‘Party’ in this Work Report, many more than in the Work Reports at the past eight Congresses.

Finally, Xi Jinping has lost no time in further consolidating his position and concentrating more power in his person. The first meeting of the new Politburo (PB) on October 27, in its notification formally recognised Xi Jinping as the ruling Communist Party’s *lingxiu* – a reverential term for “leader” instead of the usual *lingdao* or *lingji*. It also stated that henceforth all PB members will not only inspect all organisations and cadres under them and submit annual reports to the concerned central Party organisations and the PB, but also to Party General Secretary Xi Jinping. He has already announced that the anti-corruption campaign will continue to be pursued with vigour and appointed his long-time loyalist and PBSC member Zhao Leji as head of the CDIC.

A clear indication of China’s confidence in founding a modern socialist country by 2050 has already been articulated by the state-owned Global Times on October 25, 2017. Stating that some Westerners find this level of confidence challenging, it said they should actually see this as an opportunity and “it is time for these people to open their hearts to China”. Emphasising that China will not only be a strong nation with a first-class army, but will focus on its continued pursuit of harmony, balancing an ecological environment, and democracy, it said “This modernized country will serve its people, rather than seek revenge upon the world in efforts to establish global hegemony”. At the same time it warned that “China will not tolerate disruptions of any kind during this new phase of socialist modernization” adding that “if for whatever reason the nation's peaceful development is thwarted by external influence, China will not hesitate to strike back with sharp strategic force, or if necessary, prepare for a full-scale showdown. Of course, a situation of this nature will lead to consumption, and have a negative impact on the realization the nation's goal for 2050”. It said also that when “China's peaceful ascension is realized, it will be a watershed moment for humanity, a form of development completely removed from the laws of the jungle. The determination to grow into a powerful and peaceful nation will remain intact”. Pertinent to recall in this context is the resolution adopted at the

Conference on Peripheral Diplomacy in October 2013, that countries which oppose China will face periods of sustained opposition and pressure!

In conclusion, the 19th Party Congress has sent out the following clear messages:

- (i) The Party will pervade and dominate all sectors in China i.e. Government, military, economy and society;
- (ii) China is confident it will achieve the developmental goals set out for the first time by Xi Jinping i.e. 2020-2035 – to make China a technologically advanced and moderately developed country in the top ranks of the world – and 2035-2050 to make China a strong developed nation having “pioneering global influence”;
- (iii) ‘Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’ is an alternate to western-style democracy; and
- (iv) incorporation of the BRI in the Party Constitution now elevates it to a national development goal with the warning against its obstruction issued on October 25 taking on added significance.

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