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‘QIU SHI CALLS FOR PROTECTING XI JINPING AS “CORE” OF THE WHOLE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY’

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There have been important developments in China’s domestic politics in recent weeks. These have built on the Party’s assessment of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s communist credentials. Coming as these do at a time when Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are under considerable pressure due to domestic criticism and the economic situation, in addition to the all-round pressure exerted by the United States which have severely accentuated China’s difficulties, they assume significance. The CCP’s flagship theoretical magazine Qiu Shi (Seeking Truth) had in June 2014 -- within nineteen months of Xi Jinping’s assumption to power -- described Xi Jinping as “one of China’s greatest communist leaders” who had put forward “new thinking, new views and new conclusions”! That article signalled Xi Jinping’s capture of the CCP.

2. More recently Qiu Shi (2020/14 dated 15 July 2020) published two important articles. One was an article authored by Xi Jinping and which was a selection of 18 phrases culled from his speeches spread over 7 years between December 2013 and October 2019. Not quite like Mao’s Red Book, but it would be an attempt to more readily publicise and disseminate his thoughts to a national audience. More important, however, was the accompanying Qiu Shi editorial, which definitively seeks to elevate Xi Jinping’s standing in the pantheon of Chinese communist leaders. While Mao obviously stands on a different pedestal as the leader who steered the CCP to victory through the arduous Long March and as founder of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), this editorial describes Xi Jinping alone as the “core of the CCP Central Committee” which, in turn, is the “core” of the Party. Neither Deng Xiaoping nor Mao Zedong enjoyed such pre-eminence within the CCP as both had powerful veteran and stalwart Chinese communist leaders to contend with.

3. Nonetheless, the emphasis on the “two maintenances” and the “two safeguards” hints at inner-Party differences and suggests that Qiu Shi is trying to rally the Party around Xi Jinping. It highlights his contributions, but also categorically states that he “personally” commanded the effort to fight the Coronavirus epidemic – a sensitive topic inside China and the subject of much of the criticism. Particularly revealing is the direction that “Party organisations at all levels, all Party members, especially senior cadres, must follow the Party Central Committee”, the Party’s line etc. The Qiu Shi editorial appears weeks before two important events, the annual “informal” gathering of veteran leaders at the Beidaihe seaside resort and the Fifth Plenum of the 19th Party Central Committee recently announced for October 2020.

4. The lengthy 6359-word, 6-section editorial contains over 60 references to Xi Jinping making clear his leading position. It credits him and the CCP with guiding China to its present stage and asserts that the Chinese people are “lucky” to have Xi Jinping as their leader. The editorial especially calls on Party institutions, Party cadres and Party members to “protect” Xi Jinping who is the “core” of the CCP and the whole Party. This call is distilled into the phrase the “two safeguards”, also translated as the “two defends”. Salient highlights of the editorial follow.

5. The first few paragraphs of the Qiu Shi editorial stress Chinese President Xi Jinping’s personal leadership and involvement in tackling the Coronavirus epidemic. It said that under his “personal command” the Party, Government, Army and Civil and the East, West, South, North and Centre all launched an all-out war against the pandemic. Describing Xi Jinping as the “core of the Party Central Committee” and the “core of the whole Party”, it credited him with working to achieve “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”.

6. The section captioned ‘Leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’ described Xi Jinping’s selection of the 18 phrases. Calling it “the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics”, it averred that this “important” article will “further strengthen the ‘four consciousnesses’, ‘four self-confidences’ and achieve the ‘two safeguards’ for the entire party”.

7. Elaborating on the role of the Party, the section entitled ‘Party leads everything’ underscored that this “is the fundamental point of China’s stability, economic development,

national unity and social stability". It listed some important points namely: "upholding and strengthening the overall leadership of the party is related to the future and destiny of the party and the country". In this, it said, "there must be no ambiguity and vacillation". It added that "without the leadership of the CCP, our country and nation would not be able to achieve the achievements it has today, nor can it have the international status it has today, with CCP in power it is China and the Chinese people". The section highlighted Xi Jinping's role and emphasised that he has "strengthened the overall leadership of the party in all fields". It added "the core position of General Secretary Xi Jinping and the core position of the whole party have been established". "A big country like ours with a population of 1.4 billion must have a leader that everyone counts". "... a big party like ours with more than 90 million party members must have a strong core". It stated that the "Sixth plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP formally established General Secretary Xi Jinping's core position of the Party Central Committee and the core position of the whole party. The 19th National Congress of the Party included General Secretary Xi Jinping's core position of the Party Central Committee and the core position of the whole party into the Party Constitution". It called this "the luck of the party, the country, the people and the Chinese nation".

8. Discussing the "two maintenances" the article said "adhering to the leadership of the Party is to first uphold the authority of the Party Central Committee and centralised and unified leadership. This is the highest principle of the Party's leadership. Under the circumstances it must not be vague or shaken". "Maintenance of authority has always been a major issue in the building of the Marxist parties. It is vital to ensure the unity and centralisation of the party". It elaborated that "after the Zunyi (Tsunyi) conference established Comrade Mao Zedong's leadership position in the party Central Committee, our party began to form a strong leadership core". It warned that without the party's central authority and centralised unified leadership, "the party leadership will inevitably weaken and the party's cause will inevitably suffer frustration".

9. Reiterating Xi Jinping's position, it recalled that the "Sixth Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Party officially established General Secretary Xi Jinping as the core of the Party Central Committee and the entire Party". It was a "major event related to the authority of the Party Central Committee and the vitality and centralisation of the entire Party".

Implicitly praising Xi Jinping and justifying his position as the “core” of the Party, the editorial said “the political leadership is skilful and superb, the people’s feelings are sincere and broad, and the historical role is strong and firm, which fully proves that it is worthy of being the core of the Party Central Committee and the core of the entire Party”. The editorial said China has overcome difficulties and “the fundamental reason lies in maintaining the core position of General Secretary Xi Jinping, the Party Central Committee and the core position of the entire Party, and resolutely maintaining the authority and concentration of the Party Central Committee”. It again emphasised that “unified leadership will unite the entire Party, people of all ethnic groups across the country”.

10. Important was the explicit explanation of the “two maintenances”, which are essentially one, and is: “Maintaining the core position of General Secretary Xi Jinping means maintaining the authority of the Party Central Committee and centralised and unified leadership; maintaining the authority of the Party Central Committee and centralised and unified leadership must first maintain the core position of General Secretary Xi Jinping”.

11. An important feature of the editorial was the introduction of the “two safeguards”, also translated as the “two defences”, with its clear connotations and requirements. The Qiu Shi editorial declared: “to safeguard the core position of General Secretary Xi Jinping, the target is General Secretary General Secretary Xi Jinping rather than anyone else; to maintain the authority and centralised unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, the target is the Party Central Committee and not any other organisation. The authority of the Party Central Committee determines the authority of party organisations at all levels. The authority of Party organisation at all levels comes from the authority of the Party Central Committee. The “two safeguards” can neither be applied layer by layer nor extended at will”.

12. These were further reinforced with the exhortation that it is necessary to strengthen the “four consciousnesses” and “four confidences” and maintain “a high degree of consistency with the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping as the core in ideological and political actions”. Importantly, it emphasised that “Party organisations at all levels, all Party members, especially senior cadres, must follow the Party Central Committee, follow the Party’s theory, line, principles and policies, follow the Party Central Committee’s decision-making and

deployment, and unswervingly maintain the core and all aspects of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Party Central Committee".

13. The editorial stressed that these attributes strengthen the Party's overall leadership. Elaborating this it pointed out that Xi Jinping has "pioneered the proposal that the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the greatest advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Party...". It underscored that the "Party Central Committee and Xi Jinping have comprehensively strengthened and continuously perfected the Party leadership".

14. The timing of the Qiu Shi editorial's publication as well as its message are important. There are indications that Xi Jinping and the CCP are both under pressure with greater pressure on Xi Jinping. Criticisms levelled against him include adopting an assertive foreign policy and prematurely challenging the United States, which is much more powerful than China and has left China friendless during the confrontation. There is additionally considerable apprehension in the mid to higher echelons of the CCP as to what the US, which has taken punitive actions against China each week, plans to do next.

15. A Chinese official writing under the pseudonym Liang Jing wrote on July 22, 2020 that the US Administration knows "that due to his major mistakes in the epidemic and the Hong Kong issues, Xi is in his most dangerous predicament since taking office. The US has a chance that it dared not imagine: to force Xi to step down, completely changing the confrontation between the US and China".

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