



# CCAS

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#### 'XI JINPING'S LEADERSHIP APPEARS TO BE FACING OPPOSITION' by JAYADEVA RANADE

From the time Xi Jinping made his ambition for a third term clear, and for months before the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (October 6-12, 2022), China's official media has been publishing a series of articles highlighting the importance of safeguarding Xi Jinping's position as the 'core of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee'. They have emphasised that Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC)'s leadership were essential if China was to achieve its modernisation and reunification with Taiwan.

2. Though the CCP CC made clear that Xi Jinping had personally vetted candidates for the new CC, there were indications soon after the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that the CCP will be subjected to another 'rectification' campaign. A similar campaign is underway in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). "Political security", an euphemism for protecting Xi Jinping's position as the 'core of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee', 'absolute' obedience to the CCP CC, and unity, are among their main themes. The 'rectification' campaign this time will also specifically evaluate the loyalty of cadres to Xi Jinping. Retired cadres will be investigated as will senior cadres where necessary. The focus will be on the middle and junior level cadres.

3. The start of a rectification campaign so soon after the Party Congress and with emphasis on loyalty to Xi Jinping suggests dissatisfaction within the CCP. Much of the dissatisfaction would be because of the slowdown in the economy, unemployment, closure of businesses, and reductions in salaries etc.. Some would be because of Xi Jinping having secured a third term. A large number of senior and retired cadres have earlier publicly expressed unhappiness at this break with convention. Other factors include the dashed aspirations of hundreds of cadres who have been denied promotions in favour of those affiliated with Xi Jinping or his loyalists. Yet other reasons would include broader issues like Xi Jinping's support for Putin's war against Ukraine, which prompted senior cadres to write advising against such support. The deteriorating Sino-US relations is particularly a major worry for CCP cadres especially because of the ever present threat of US sanctions which, if imposed, will directly impact millions of Chinese. In the last couple of months a few of the more reputed Chinese scholars in China's prestigious think-tanks and universities have advised restraint in responding to 'America's provocations' and suggested that efforts be made to improve ties.

4. A bluntly worded article in the CCP's official newspaper People's Daily on January 6, 2023, contained numerous references to political issues and dangers. These suggest that the rectification is to safeguard Xi Jinping's position and expel those influenced by western liberal ideas. The article declared that the aim is to "resolutely eliminate the 'two-faced people' who betray the Party, resolutely investigate and deal with violations of laws and regulations that are intertwined with political and economic issues, eradicate political gangs that form cliques and serve private interests, eliminate serious hidden political dangers in the Party, safeguard political security, and ensure the political position and political interests of the whole Party." The implication clearly is that rival factions and disloyal cadres exist.

5. Within days of its publication, while speaking at the second plenary session of the CCP's powerful anti-corruption watchdog body, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) on January 9, Xi Jinping issued a sharp warning that the CDIC would enforce "a high degree of awareness of compliance and discipline" and asked every member of the Communist Party, especially leading cadres, to abide by Party discipline and "get into the habit of working and living in a supervised and restrained environment". The current Minister of Public Security and close associate of Xi Jinping Wang Xiaohong had in 2021 suggested to Xi Jinping that particularly all Politburo and Central Committee members should be monitored. Xi Jinping added "It is necessary to combine the theme education that will be carried out in the whole party, focus on pure thinking and pure organization as prominent issues, effectively strengthen political education and party spirit education, strictly enforce the law and discipline, resolutely eliminate black sheep, and build a loyal, clean and responsible iron army with iron discipline". He called for a severe crackdown on those so-called "political liars" who have "backgrounds".

6. The seriousness of the problem was further highlighted on January 19, 2023, when the CDIC's official website posted an article by Fu Mingxian, Member of the Standing Committee of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee, Secretary of the Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection and Director of the Supervisory Commission. It was titled 'Carry out the spirit of the second plenary session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection - Promote the improvement of the party's self-revolutionary institutional normative'. Stressing that "the political supervision system must more consciously assume the major political responsibility for the "two safeguards", it described the "Two safeguards" as the highest political principle of the party and the fundamental task of strengthening political supervision in the new era". It called for the "accurate identification and timely investigation of "seven existing" problems, promptly eliminating political "double-faced people" and "double-faced factions", and resolutely preventing all kinds of "low-level reds" and "high-level blacks" that undermine the unity of the party. The article particularly emphasised that senior cadres would be closely monitored and said "strengthening the joint supervision of the "top leaders" and the leadership team is the top priority. From a practical point of view, the reason why leading cadres, especially the "top leaders" are difficult to supervise, is closely related to the lack of supervision and coordination. It is necessary to conscientiously implement the "Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Strengthening the Supervision of "Top Leaders" and Leading Groups" and supervise superiors, peers, and subordinates."

7. Meanwhile reports indicate the existence of factions which are not all affiliated to Xi Jinping or his loyalists. Some are affiliated to former veteran cadres while others are associated with some of Xi Jinping's loyalists. With the passage of time and the growing gap in age and seniority, Xi Jinping will become more dependent on his loyalists to select cadres for senior positions. New factions will undoubtedly emerge and not all will support Xi Jinping.

8. On October 30, the CDIC disclosed that Li Xiaobao, former Secretary of the Party Group and Director of the Jiangxi Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, had again been placed under investigation. In probably the first political verdict to mention the "two safeguards" after they were included in the Party Charter at the recently concluded 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, it said "Li Xiaobao lost his ideals and beliefs, betrayed the "two safeguards" etc. The slogan of 'Two Safeguards', first coined in 2018, is to "resolutely safeguard General Secretary Xi Jinping's core position of the Party Central Committee and the core position of the whole party" and to "resolutely safeguard the authority and centralized and unified leadership of the Party Central Committee".

9. More recently on January 6, 2023, the Chinese financial publication Caixin disclosed that Xu Ming, former Deputy Head of the State Administration of Grain, had pleaded guilty on January 4 at the Xiamen Intermediate People's Court to taking more than 52.4 million yuan (\$7.6 million) in bribes. He

was accused of taking advantage of his positions between 1995 and 2021 at the Ministry of Commerce and earlier the State Economic and Trade Commission. The report implied that by charging Xu Ming who had previously worked under Bo Xilai, the former Politburo member who was sentenced to life in prison in October 2013, Xi Jinping was still actively uncovering members of opposing factions.

10. The CDIC also announced that 61-year old Li Chunsheng, former Guangdong Deputy Governor and Public Security Chief for eight years until he stepped down in 2021 and currently Deputy Director of the Guangdong People's Congress Standing Committee, had been placed under investigation. This announcement carried an implicit message of the importance of loyalty to Xi Jinping. Li Chunsheng had worked with Sun Lijun when the latter took charge of the Public Security Ministry's Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan Affairs Office, in which the Guangdong's police department plays a key role. Sun Lijun was a former Deputy Minister of Public Security who had been awarded a suspended death sentence and jailed for life for "seriously damaging the unity of the party" and leading a "political clique". China's Public Security Ministry, where Sun was a deputy minister until 2020, held a meeting to denounce him and vowed to eradicate the "venomous" influence of his "political clique".

11. Another faction with the potential to cause Xi Jinping trouble is that of the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin who died last October. They constitute a powerful Shanghai faction, but with their leader's death it's members are leaderless and their futures have become more uncertain. They will add to the pool of discontented elements. Reports that Xi Jinping has prepared plans to purge members of Jiang Zemin's faction and that more than 15,000 CCP officials and 3000 entrepreneurs affiliated to Jiang Zemin are slated to be purged and have their assets confiscated, will have unnerved them further.

12. By appointing loyalists to all top posts in China's security establishment Xi Jinping will be able to detect discontent, but it is unlikely that he will be able to get all factions to fall in line. Resolving the economic problems will be important for Xi Jinping to stabilise the political situation. Till then Xi Jinping is likely to impose increasingly stringent measures to ensure discipline in the Party and the general populace.

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