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'XI JINPING PREPARING TO INITIATE ANOTHER 'PARTY RECTIFICATION'

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Since Chinese President Xi Jinping withdrew the stringent zero-Covid restrictions overnight and eased the campaign against China's tech platforms, there has been considerable speculation in the international media to suggest that Xi Jinping had been weakened by the popular protests. A few observers suggested that some members of the Politburo or its Standing Committee had together urged Xi Jinping to amend the policies. There are, however, no indications that point to a weakening of Xi Jinping's power or authority.

2. On the contrary, since the 20th Party Congress (October 6-22, 2022) there have been clear indications that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is gearing up to begin another round of its 'rectification' campaign. It is clear that this time the rectification campaign this time will especially evaluate the cadres' loyalty to Xi Jinping and investigate senior cadres. Party Cadres who have retired will also be investigated where necessary.

3. In an announcement seemingly timed to emphasise that there will be a focus on senior cadres, the CCP's anti-corruption watchdog Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) disclosed 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 provincial legislature's standing committee, had been placed under investigation. The announcement also conveyed the importance of loyalty to Xi Jinping as Li Chunsheng happened to have 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.

4. A series of articles and statements by senior CCP officials have set the tone for the campaign. The first indications were in the speeches by Chen Wenqing, Politburo member and Secretary General of the CCP CC's powerful Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, during his inspection visit to Shaanxi province on November 16 – 18, 2022. The People's Daily (November 19) observed that while speaking to cadres of the procuratorates, public security, national security, and judicial administrative agencies, he emphasised that they should "always maintain a firm and correct political direction on the political and legal front, defend the "two establishments" with practical actions, and achieve the "two safeguards." The phrase "Two Safeguards" was, incidentally, incorporated in the CCP Constitution in October 2022

5. This was reinforced by Chen Xi, former Politburo member and the outgoing head of the CCP Central Committee (CC) Central Organization Department, in a major article published by the People's Daily on November 23. The article on 'building a team of high-quality cadres worthy of the important task of national rejuvenation' insisted the organizational line must be to ensure a high degree of awareness of the political line and that strengthening and improving the work of cadres in the new era "is related to the prosperity and long-term stability of the party and the country". Importantly, he emphasised the necessity of "vigorously selecting cadres who firmly support the "two establishments", resolutely achieve the "two safeguards", and maintain a high degree of consistency with the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core in terms of ideology, politics and actions, and resolutely put those political "two maintenances" in line". The phrase "Two Safeguards" was incidentally incorporated in the CCP Constitution in October 2022.

6. The following day the People's Daily (November 24) published a major article by Guo Shengkun, outgoing Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission. Underscoring "the absolute leadership of the party", he stressed the need to "deeply understand the decisive significance of the "two establishments", and strengthen the "four consciousnesses" and added that "The new strategic environment, the risks and challenges that need to be dealt with, the contradictions and problems that need to be resolved are more complicated than before, and the promotion of the modernization of the national security system and capabilities is of greater and far-reaching significance". He reiterated that "various "black swan" and "grey rhinoceros" incidents may occur at any time and that China faces increasing risks.

7. An important article authored by the Central and State Organ Working Committee Theoretical Learning Center Group and published in the People's Daily on December 26, outlined the scope of the rectification campaign. It declared that "consolidating the long-term ruling position of the party and ensuring that the party will always be the strong leadership core of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics", thus clarifying that loyalty to Xi Jinping will be the key criteria in the evaluation of cadres. Setting out the scope of the rectification campaign, it said "The central and state organs are the closest to the Party Central Committee and serve the Party Central Committee most directly. They are the first phalanx for practicing the "two safeguards" and the "first mile" for implementing the decisions and deployments of the Party Central Committee. To deepen comprehensive and strict party governance and carry out self-revolution, we must start with the central government and state organs, and start with the party building of the organs". The article warned party members and cadres "to deeply understand the decisive significance of the "two establishments" and strengthen the "four Consciousness", strengthen the "four self-confidences", achieve "two safeguards" ... and provide a strong guarantee for the implementation of various work responsibilities assigned by the Party Central Committee to the central and state organs".

8. Days later the Guangming Daily (December 28) asserted "There is no unity without struggle, and no struggle without unity". It stressed that "Unity and struggle are the source of stability for Marxist party organizations. Organizational unity is the foundation of political party unity". It urged the people to "Adhere to and strengthen the party's overall leadership and forge a firm "backbone" and added that it is necessary to "adhere to and strengthen the overall

leadership of the party, resolutely safeguard the authority of the Party Central Committee and the centralized and unified leadership, and implement the party's leadership in all aspects of the party and the country's business, so that the party will always be the best when storms strike". It emphasised "the decisive significance of the "two establishments", strengthen the "four consciousnesses", strengthen the "four self-confidence", and achieve the "two safeguards", so as to ensure that the whole party and the whole country have a strong political cohesion and develop self-confidence".

9. The clearest warning that a rectification campaign was to get underway in the CCP was, however, the Politburo's "democratic life" meeting held on December 26 – 27, 2022, and chaired by Xi Jinping. Its agenda reported by the People's Daily (December 28) was unambiguous. Xinhua stated it was "to fully implement Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, deeply understand the decisive significance of "two establishments", and strengthen the "two establishments". It said the "Four Consciousnesses", firm "Four Confidences", and "Two Maintenances", unite and lead party members and cadres to implement the major decisions and deployments made by the 20th National Congress of the Party ... take the lead in achieving the "two safeguards" ... sum up achievements, investigate and address deficiencies, conduct party analysis, and carry out criticism and self-criticism". Xinhua added that in their speeches the Politburo members focused on the need to "have a deeper understanding of the decisive significance of the "two establishments", and to further enhance the ideological, political and action consciousness of "two maintenances"; and "to have a deeper understanding of the role of leading cadres in comprehensively and strictly governing the party. They must be stricter than self-revolution, and consciously set an example for the entire party in abiding by rules and disciplines". Calling for "comprehensively and strictly governing the party", it said "the meeting emphasized that this year is an extremely important year in the history of the party and the country".

10. In its reporting, the state-owned CGTN asserted that the previous year had seen "the decisive significance of establishing Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole" and quoted Xi Jinping as saying that the "unity, readiness to meet challenges and cohesion of the CPC central leadership" had been beneficial. Xi Jinping told the Politburo's "democratic life" meeting that "upholding the centralized, unified leadership of the Party Central Committee is one of the founding principles of the ruling party" and "called on members of the Political Bureau to maintain a high degree of unity with the Central Committee, follow the course and the will of the Party, and maintain loyalty to the Party at all times and under all circumstances". Xi Jinping said, "For a party and a country as big as ours, if the Central Committee can't exercise strong, centralized and unified leadership, party members will act in their own separate ways and nothing can be accomplished." Citing political ability as "the most important competence for members of the Political Bureau to perform their duties", Xi Jinping underscored that Politburo members should set an example in abiding by the code of honest conduct and taking the lead in fulfilling the political responsibility for the governance of the Party. He said they should be strict with their family members, relatives and those around them, and never allow them to seek illegitimate interests by taking advantage of their power and influence.

11. The warnings got sharply accentuated this month when the People's Daily (January 6) used language for Xi Jinping's opponents last used between 2017-2019 and which stressed

the need to heighten political supervision to improve cohesion in the CCP. The People's Daily article emphasised that cadres must "deeply understand the decisive significance of Two Establishments, resolutely achieve the Two Safeguards and ensure that the whole Party moves forward in unison." It highlighted Xi Jinping's position as the core of the CCP. The article cited cases investigated by the CDIC's National Supervision Commission to enforce political discipline and rules, "purify the political ecology within the Party", and fight "against people and things that threaten the authority and centralised and unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee". While doing so it revealed that "many leading cadres have been investigated and dealt with for violating discipline and law." In a thinly veiled suggestion that loyalty to Xi Jinping will be the focus, the article quoted an unidentified discipline official as saying that the aim is to "resolutely eliminate the 'two-faced people' who betray the Party". It similarly referred to the task to "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."

12. This was followed by another toughly worded article (January 19) 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, which was posted on the official website of China's Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC). It bluntly declared that "the political supervision system must more consciously assume the major political responsibility for the "two safeguards" and described the "Two safeguards" as the highest political principle of the party and the fundamental task of strengthening political supervision in the new era". Injecting a sense of urgency, it called for the "accurate identification and timely investigation of "seven existing" problems", prompt elimination of "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 and unity of the party". In a warning to senior echelon cadres it called for "strengthening the joint supervision of the "top leaders" and the leadership team" and said "the reason why leading cadres, especially the "top leaders" are difficult to supervise, is closely related to the lack of supervision and coordination".

13. While Xi Jinping has been able to place loyalists in crucial senior positions at the 20th Party Congress held last October, it is apparent that he is now focussing on the senior and middle echelons of the CCP. Many of them are supporters of the former CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin, or younger cadres who are nominees of Xi Jinping's loyalists. Separately there are indications that the security apparatus is also likely to be subjected to a rectification. The Party rectification campaign will have also been prompted by the slowing economy which has resulted in burgeoning unemployment, closure of thousands of businesses, reducing of incomes of central and provincial government employees and withdrawing of bonuses. Another factor would be the residual resentment at the stringent zero-Covid rules and the adverse growing international environment which Xi Jinping has been candidly referring to in his speeches.

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