

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > China: Towards the 19th Party Congress

China: Towards the 19th Party Congress

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Tue, 10/17/2017 - 08:17

Paper No. 6313

Dated 17-Oct-2017

By Bhaskar Roy

The 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is scheduled to start on October 18. The date was announced well in advance, indicating everything has been set, including personnel changes in the Politburo (PB) of the Central Committee, as well as its Standing Committee (PBSC). This suggests that power broking by heavy weights, especially former senior leaders, have been reduced or eliminated by Xi Jinping. There are no contemporaries of Xi who can question him.

At this congress, party elders are not expected to be seen on the podium or any prominent place. An article headlined, "Tea gets cold when the guest goes away", in the official media last year was a clear message to Jiang Zemin, China's fourth generation leader, not to interfere in affairs of the party or the government.

In the last five years since Xi Jinping has been elected Party General Secretary, a power struggle has been raging between the Jiang Zemin faction and Xi Jinping faction.

The cause of the "war" was revealed by the PLA Daily last year. It wrote that former Vice Chairmen of the CMC, Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou were removed because of fundamental political mistakes (both were Jiang's men, opposed to Xi Jinping). Of course, corruption charges were there, but who in China is not corrupt?

Top level officers who were brought down include former PBSC member Zhou Yangkang; former PB member and party chief of Chongqing municipality Bo XiLai (a princeling), former vice chairmen of China's top political advisory body Ling Jihua and Su Rong. Jiang Zemin lost some of his top power brokers.

The latest to fall is Sun Zhengcai, party secretary of Chongqing municipality, PB member and a rising star. He was seen as a future General Secretary of CCP and may have been elevated to the PBSC. He was removed mid-July but his crime was published only on September 30, almost two and a half months later. **It is officially described as “serious discipline violations” euphemism for not toeing Xi’s political line and for his earlier links to Bo Xilai.** He was replaced by Chen Min’er, a Xi acolyte. Chen may get a helicopter promotion at the Congress.

One question on Tigers remain. Will Xi bring down “old Tigers” like Jiang Zemin? If he does so he will open himself to future retribution if the opportunity comes by. Jiang was party chief, which Xi is now – a sacrosanct position from where all powers come. Mao, despite his disastrous politics, especially the Cultural Revolution leading to the death of around 30 million people, remained untouched as the signature of the revolution. But on his death his infamous ‘gang of four’ were incarcerated till death.

Power struggle is endemic to China’s politics. It was there during the communist revolution, the Long March and later. Even after the 19th Party Congress power struggle will continue. It is most likely that Xi will target four PBSC members known to be Jiang’s men, who have tried to trip up Xi Jinping on significant political issues like Hong Kong, Taiwan and even the Doklam military standoff against India. Xi will find it difficult to withdraw from these positions to project a more acceptable foreign policy. He will be criticized as weak. According to an old Chinese saying – when a huge wave comes, duck under it and it will pass. But people will not forget the wave and who created it.

Chinese politics is opaque at its very best. But palace politics is very difficult to decipher by outsiders and by the Chinese themselves. What happens in Zhongnanhai remains there till there is an outburst. Even then, very sensitive issues are prohibited by law. This happened with the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward and the Hundred Flowers Movement. Intellectuals were labelled as the “eighth stinking Category”, because they voiced constructive criticism. Criticism is discouraged in China and even senior leaders have to tip toe around it. Power holders sometimes make policy statements apparently in support of the leader, but there are hidden traps.

Jiang’s support helped Xi to become Party General Secretary at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. Jiang did not have any special love for Xi. He wanted the Communist Youth League Faction’s Li Keqiang kept out of the top position. Jiang felt that he had corralled Xi with his network. Xi Jinping, who maintained a low profile was quick to see through this. Although a Princeling, Xi really did not participate in the Princeling faction. He quietly nurtured the provinces he served in, including making very quiet inroads in the PLA.

The Princeling faction, anyway is in total disarray. Xi’s predecessor, Hu Jintao, passed all power centres to him smoothly, including the

chairmanship of the CMC, a post Jiang held on to for two extended years from Hu Jintao, and gave up only under pressure from senior retired military leaders, some of whom were Long Marchers.

Time was of essence for Xi. He moved quickly unleashing the anti-corruption campaign with the able assistance of Wang Qishan, his security czar, PBSC member, an old friend and his right hand man.

Xi also started reining in the media with the directive that the media supports the Party and propagates the party's policy. People and their views were choked.

He set about wide restructuring of the military, putting himself at the centre, much more than any earlier CMC Chairmen did. The 90th anniversary celebration of the PLA was an unprecedented exhibition of China's military might. Xi was in military uniform. It certainly was an occasion of pride and display of extreme nationalism for the military personnel.

Xi dismantled four different departments under the CMC into fifteen different departments. The seven Military Regions were reconstructed into five commands. With MRs, the army leaders were a power unto themselves. It may be recalled that Deng Xiaoping as the Chairman of the CMC reduced eleven MRs to seven. He took the first step to revert to the dictum that **"The party commands the gun"**.

Xi Jinping's Drive

Xi took over as the Party chairman at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, as President in March 2013 at the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chairman of the CMC in course. It was a smooth transition from his predecessor Hu Jintao, who withdrew into the background. But Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin continued to manipulate power from the background, through his acolytes well down to the township level at least. Xi did not waste time in his anti-corruption campaign. According to Xinhua (Oct.7) more than 70,000 officials at or above the country-head level have been investigated for corruption. Since the 18th Party Congress. According to the Central Commission of Discipline Inspection 1.34 million township-level and 648,000 Party members and officials were punished during this period.

With a strategically cultivated low profile in his earlier years, Xi Jinping discarded his robe of invisibility after taking over power in 2012. He gradually went to high visibility at a rapid pace. He retained Jiang Zemin's "two centennial celebrations (the party's one hundred years in 2021) when China will become a moderately well to do nation doubling the 2010 GDP/per capita income; one hundred years of the People's Republic in 2049 when China will become a prosperous country). The first target appears achievable and within Xi's second term. Saying anything about 2049 will be speculation. Xi will take the credit for 2021, and it would be appropriate.

Xi's two major policy initiatives were the "Chinese Dream" (rejuvenation of China to its glorious past) and the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) project a modern version of China's old trade routes. Both are interconnected and interdependent as both are connected to the economy.

These two projects have caught the imagination of not only the Chinese people but also the international community. The latter have showed significant inquisitiveness in the OBOR, which is also referred to as “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). What will it eventually evolve as?

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is held up by both China and Pakistan as the flagship project of the BRI. Beijing is going around with a placard of investing over \$ 50 billion in the project. Pakistani economic experts have raised several material questions. Why have details of the project been kept secret as it is bandied about as an economic project? The power plants to be put up by the Chinese will cost consumers much more per unit than domestic power producers. Will Pakistan be able to pay back the loan, or like in the Sri Lankan case of Hambantota port will China take over projects on a 99 years lease? Similar questions are being discussed in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The BRI is a strategic project. India has declined to participate in the BRI on grounds of sovereignty. Without India in the bag the BRI through Bangladesh and Nepal will be non-operational. The BRI could eventually challenge Xi.

Xi has cracked hard on politics and the media. The policies suggest very high suspicion of the western narrative of political thought. In colleges and universities a policy of “7 Nos” has been imposed. These include no discussion on democracy, no discussion on universal values among other things. There could be a dichotomy here. An increasing number of Chinese students are going to the west for higher studies and returning to China. It is impossible for the state and the party to control their thinking. How will the two accommodate each other? Nobody expects a clash now but eventually problems may arise.

The media is in a tight bind. Xi Jinping himself said that the media serves the Party. The media does not have any room for honest journalism. The internet is also being squeezed hard.

It is not that all Chinese, especially the media and intellectuals are jumping with joy. There are rumblings below the surface. As Mao had said it takes a spark to light a prairie on fire!

Party Constitution

It is most certain that the Party Constitution will be revised at the congress. In an orchestrated move, Xi was declared as the “Core” of the Party, a title held by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were also the core of the party, but in a rather light manner. In Xi’s case it is in parallel to Mao and Deng, on whom the title was bestowed almost in a consensus decision. In Xi case, however, there is a smell of manipulation. In the past two months at least, there is a propaganda blitz announcing the achievements since Xi took over power. Very little has been said about the landmark successes of the past. It is Xi all the way.

It is very likely that Xi Jinping's "Thought" will be incorporated in the constitution like Mao Zedong's Thought and Deng Xiaoping's Theory (which is a Thought). Jiang's Three Represents and Hu Jintao's scientific developments are light weights in comparison. Xi's Thoughts on the military is already in the official media.

There will be revisions in mass organisations and the Communist Youth League (CYL). The CYL may become toothless, and Xi has officially berated the CYL.

Will there be any change in the tenure of ten years of the Party General Secretary? That is the trillion Yuan question.

Xi's Challenges

Apart from the challenges indicted in the foregoing, Xi Jinping appears to have taken a lot of responsibility on himself. His late father vice-premier Xi Zhongxun was a disciple of Deng Xiaoping, the father of China's modernization. It was expected that Xi Jinping would be at least an economic liberal. But expectations seem to have been belied in the last five years he has turned into a political and ideological control master.

According to a Chinese economist (name not revealed), China is still a "planned economy", not a market economy. The state owner enterprises (SOEs) still garner 70 percent of the state funding, while their contribution to the economic growth is far less. There is a debt crisis also. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast, household, corporate and government debt would increase to almost 300 percent of gross domestic product by 2022 from 242 percent last year.

The housing bubble is about to burst unless the state injects subsidies. There was a financial meltdown in 2015, and the government stepped in with a huge bailout.

The new policy of establishing party committees in all enterprises including in foreign Chinese joint enterprises would be a damper. Party committees are no economic experts. They impose the political line. The business community is unhappy.

The BRI is expected to take the excess capacity abroad, but that will depend on countries that join it. Already road blocks are coming up.

According to economist Louis Kuij's of Oxford, economic reform would have to comply with three key tenets of the socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics: "a strong role for SOEs, a strong role for the government and adherence by all key players to party leadership". Basically a top down party control, and Deng's contemporary Chen Yun's theory of "bird cage economy". The cage is the political ideology and bird is the economy.

Xi Jinping has arrogated all powers unto himself. He heads the Central Leading Group of Comprehensively Deepening Reforms and the Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs. Xi also unveiled the Financial Stability Development Commission in July.

Xi is no economist. He is a politician. He has also proved he is no liberal, with his powers he carries responsibility. His opponents will be waiting for him to make some serious mistakes. The Chinese are known for their patience. Xi Jinping will have to be constantly on guard.

(The writer is a New Delhi based strategic analyst. He can be reached at e-mail grouchohart@yahoo.com [1])

Tags:

[China-CCP 2017](#) [2]

[Xi Jinping](#) [3]

[BRI](#) [4]

Category:

[Papers](#) [5]

Countries:

[China](#) [6]

Topics:

[Political](#) [7]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2220>

Links

[1] <mailto:grouchohart@yahoo.com>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1778>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/83>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1777>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/china>

[7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>