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‘INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF XI JINPING’S WORK REPORT AT 19TH PARTY CONGRESS’

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The crucial 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) opened in Beijing on October 18, 2017, amidst stringent security restrictions in Beijing and other major cities in China. Nearly a thousand foreign reporters from 130 countries are reported to be covering the Congress. The Congress was preceded by other important meetings, namely the 7th and last Plenum of the 18th CCP Central Committee (CC), and of the Party’s powerful anti-corruption body the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) chaired by Xi Jinping’s close associate and Politburo Standing Committee member, Wang Qishan.

CCP CC General Secretary Xi Jinping, who holds fourteen formal positions -- more than any other CCP leader so far -- is poised to emerge stronger from this Congress. His sustained anti-corruption campaign 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, including more than 86 officers of and above the rank of Major General.

Just weeks before the Congress, Xi Jinping publicly demonstrated his authority by arresting two top Generals, appointing 20 Generals 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. Politburo member and Chongqing Party Secretary Sun Zhengcai, viewed a likely candidate for the 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 has 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.

An estimated 34 PLA officers, from the 41 who are members of the CCP CC, and nearly 200 of the 376 members of the CC will be replaced, making it the highest turnover since the 9th Party Congress in 1969 and providing Xi Jinping an unprecedented opportunity to induct persons of his choice. Xi Jinping has paved the way for the induction of many loyalists or individuals who would owe their allegiance to him by promoting, or positioning, them in key slots in the PLA and Party apparatus. Important will be how many people of his choice he is able to bring into the Politburo (PB) and Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). If Xi Jinping does acquire full control of the PB and PBSC, 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 could additionally leave open the possibility of him extending his term till nearly 2049.

CCP CC General Secretary Xi Jinping took three and a half hours – twice the time taken by Hu Jintao at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012 -- to read the 32,000-character, 10-section Work Report to the 2,280 delegates representing 89 million CCP members. The emphasis on Party building, the Party's role, and notion that "ideology determines culture" were predominant. Terms like 'Four Cardinal Principles' and 'let a hundred flowers bloom and let a hundred schools of thought contend' were present. There was specific reference to the 'evolution of principle contradiction' which was subsequently explained in a separate Xinhua despatch. New was a special section devoted to Ecology and the Environment.

The delegates included 253 from the PLA and 50 from the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) with 186 from Central government agencies, 109 from Departments directly under the CCP CC, 53 from central State owned Enterprises (SoEs), and 44 from the Financial Sector. There are 551 women and 264 ethnic minorities delegates. All delegates were elected through a competitive process except in the Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions.

Xi Jinping was watched by 74 senior veteran Party cadres who attended. These veteran cadres remain very influential but do not have voting rights. Included among them were 102-year old Song Ping, who was the most senior, and Xi Jinping's immediate predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin who are 75 years and 91 years old respectively. Also attending were: former Premiers Wen Jiabao and Zhu Rongji; former Chinese Vice President Zeng Qinghong; and former Politburo Standing Committee members Li Ruihuan and Jia Qinglin.

The 32,000-character Work Report outlined a confident, bold two-stage plan for goals to be achieved by China by 2050. Xi Jinping for the first time set timelines and declared that by the end of the first phase (2020-2035) China will be an innovative, technologically advanced, large, middle-income country ranking among the top nations in the world. By completion of the second stage (2035-2050), China should be a nation with "pioneering global influence". Implicit is that China will rival or surpass the US in strength and be pro-active in international affairs to promote its interests. The Work Report outlined the leadership's plans for China over the next five years and though essentially its focus is on domestic issues it did, as per past practice, touch on international affairs. The Party, China and Army were mentioned often along with a specific reference to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Less mentioned were the economy, reform and development.

Xi Jinping described the situation at home and abroad as "undergoing profound and complex changes", but added that "China's development is still in an important strategic opportunity, the prospects are bright" though "the challenge is also very serious". He advised all Party members to take a long-term perspective and be vigilant.

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 pointedly described the PLA as a "people's army".

The section on foreign policy did not name any country. It contained a reference to the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'. Xi Jinping called "on all peoples to work together to build a human destiny, build lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, open tolerance, clean and beautiful world". He asked countries to "respect each other, mutual consultation, and resolutely abandon the Cold War mentality and power politics" and said it is necessary to "follow a new road of state-to-state engagement without forming any alliances". He said "We must insist on resolving disputes through dialogue, resolving differences through consultation, coping with traditional and non-traditional security threats, and opposing all forms of terrorism". He stressed that "China firmly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace, respects the rights of all peoples to choose their own path of development, upholds international fairness and justice, opposes the imposition of their will on others, opposes interference in the internal affairs of other countries and opposes strong bullying".

Appearing to take note of the criticism prompted by the huge debt burden on Sri Lanka because of the BRI and criticism in Pakistan, he said "China will never sacrifice the interests of other countries at the expense of the development of their own, and never give up their legitimate rights and interests, no one wants to let China damage their own interests and have a bitter fruit". He assured that "China pursues a defensive national defense policy. China's development does not pose a threat to any country. China no matter what degree of development it follows, but never seek hegemony, never engage in expansion".

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". Referring to Hongkong and Macau, he said the policy of "one country, two systems" has proved to be the best institutional guarantee for the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macao after their return.

Xi Jinping's imprimatur on the Work Report was clearly visible. It gave a prominent and leading role to the Party in every sphere. Xi Jinping unambiguously declared that China would not have made the progress it had without the leadership of the CCP. He said "historic shifts" have been made in the cause of the Communist Party of China and the country in the past five years. 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. The word 'Party' figured 235 and 234 times in the Work Reports presented at the 18th and 17th Party Congresses.

A significant achievement for Xi Jinping was inclusion of the 'Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', already being headlined throughout the Chinese media as "Xi Jinping's Thought" and which will be incorporated by amendment in the Party Constitution. An entire section of the Work Report defined this 'Thought'. This includes: "the Party's goal of building a strong military in the new era is to build the people's forces into world class forces that obey the Party's command, can fight and win, and maintain excellent conduct"; "major country diplomacy aims to foster a new type of international relations and build a community with a shared future"; and the "defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party". These imply a global role for the CCP.

Reading the report Xi Jinping said the CCP "has given shape to the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" which "builds on and further enriches Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development." Saying "It represents the latest achievement in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context", Xi Jinping called it a long-term "guide to action" which the Party must adhere to and develop. It is uncertain whether Xi Jinping's name will be attached to the 'Thought'. In any case, by having his contribution to China's guiding ideological principles designated as "Thought", Xi Jinping has succeeded in elevating his stature next only to that of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

While 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* (see Appendix). Interestingly, in apparent indication of support to Xi Jinping, PBSC members Zhang Dejiang, Liu Yunshan and Yu Zhengsheng separately praised the "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" to delegates from the provinces during their group discussions on the sidelines of the ongoing Congress.

Over the next couple of days they were joined by others publicly displaying their loyalty to General Secretary Xi Jinping. Among them were: Beijing Party Secretary Cai Qi, who called it "the third historic leap forward in China's application of Marxist-Leninism, after Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory"; Shanghai Mayor Ying Yong; General Xu Qiliang, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission; Jiangsu Party Secretary Li Qiang who said he felt "warmth and affection" for Xi Jinping's report; Shanghai Party Secretary Han Zheng, who called it a "thrilling" report; Tianjin Party Secretary Li Hongzhong who said the report was "magnificent, visionary and a pioneer of the era"; Chongqing Party Secretary Chen Min'er who praised Xi Jinping by name several times in his seven-minute speech at the municipality's panel; 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; and Guangdong Party Secretary Hu Chunhua, though reports claimed he

was more restrained. Earlier, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi wrote in *Study Times*, the official newspaper of the Central Party School (September 1, 2017) that Xi Jinping's "diplomatic thought" "innovates upon and transcends the past 300 years of traditional Western international relations theory." Much earlier on July 19, State Councillor Yang Jiechi praised Xi Jinping Thought in a signed article in *Xinhua*. PLA Units across China have been formed into 'group study sessions' since October 18, 2017, to study Xi Jinping's Work Report.

Declaring that corruption is "the greatest threat" the Party faces, Xi Jinping promised in the Report that the anti-corruption campaign will continue. He announced that the intra-Party disciplinary practice of '*Shanggui*', that requires a CPC member under investigation to cooperate with questioning at a designated place and a designated time, will be replaced with detention. Suggesting that the anti-corruption campaign will be elevated to a higher pitch, Xi Jinping disclosed that a National Supervision Law -- under discussion for passing at the National People's Congress (NPC) session in March 2018 -- will be enacted and supervisory commissions at the national, provincial, city, and county levels will be established. There has, incidentally, been speculation in Beijing that Wang Qishan, who in the normal course is expected to retire at this Congress, could be nominated Chairman of the new National Supervision Commission which could oversee even the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC).

Highlighting that economic growth had picked up in the last five years since 2012, Xi Jinping mentioned a 6.8 per cent growth rate target. He said China's GDP rose from 54 trillion to 80 trillion yuan (US\$ 8.2-US\$ 12.1 trillion) over the past five years. He also said 1500 reform measures had been introduced in the past five years and a lot of pending plans had been implemented. However, while he said "We will further reform of SOEs, develop mixed-ownership economic entities, and turn Chinese enterprises into world-class, globally competitive firms", there was a hint of resistance to the streamlining of SoEs when he added that there will be further reform of the State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) to make them "stronger, better and bigger".

Regional and individual income inequalities and poverty were emphasised repeatedly in the Work Report as requiring close attention. Barely a month earlier on September 14, the Hurun Rich List revealed that at least 74 individuals had joined this year's list with fortunes of at least US\$ 300 million, adding to the 2,056 who made last year's list. Rupert Hoogewerf, Hurun Report Chairman and Chief Researcher, said "Overall, the Hurun Rich List has grown faster than any year since 2007, with the possible exception of 2015." Poverty alleviation has been a key theme this year and merited its own paragraph in the Report. Xi Jinping also opted to represent the poverty-stricken Guizhou province as its delegate to the 19th Congress. He said that more than 60 million people have been lifted out of poverty over the past five years, but much remains to be done.

While there was no direct reference to the Dalai Lama or India in the Work Report, or for that matter to any other country, but Xi Jinping did state: "we will fully implement the Party's policy on religious affairs, uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation ... and adapt to socialist society". The section on National Security indicated Xi Jinping's policy when he said "we must rigorously protest against and take resolute measures to combat all acts of infiltration, subversion, and sabotage, as well as violent and terrorist activities, ethnic separatist activities and religious extremist activities".

At a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing Party Congress on October 21, the Executive Deputy Head and Vice Minister of the CCP CC United Front Work Department, Zhang Yijiong was more direct. In a remark with implications for India, he asserted that the Dalai Lama "established a so-called government-in-exile, whose goal and core agenda is the independence of Tibet and to separate (from) China. For decades, the group headed by the 14th Dalai Lama has never stopped

such attempts. As head of the group, the 14th Dalai Lama has never stopped his activities in this regard over the past decades". Zhang Yijiong warned foreign officials they cannot get away by saying they were meeting the exiled Tibetan leader in a personal capacity as they still represent their governments. He added "Any country, or any organisation of anyone, accepting to meet with the Dalai Lama, in our view, is a major offence to the sentiment of the Chinese people. The Chinese government opposes governments and organizations in any country in the world to receive the Dalai Lama in any name. We consider such visit as a severe insult to the feelings of the Chinese people...". Zhang Yijiong added that Tibetan Buddhism was a special religion "born in our ancient China". "It's a Chinese religion. It didn't come in from the outside."

The Work Report made clear that the anti-corruption campaign will continue unabated. Party ideology will become more dominant with increased curbs to stall tendencies towards 'liberal' or 'westernised' thinking. Instructions cautioning Party members to be atheists, avoid any religious practice and abide by Party regulations were re-issued just days prior to the Congress indicating that there will be no relaxation in religious policy or towards Tibetans and Uyghurs. The trend towards expanding the security apparatus will continue with Xi Jinping probably exercising greater direct control over it.

It is apparent that China will continue to pursue its objectives in the South China Sea. Suspicion of the ruling DPP in Taiwan will ensure continued pressure on it, possibly with efforts to further squeeze its diplomatic space. The comments regarding India made at the press briefing on the sidelines of the Congress give little room for comfort.

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APPENDIX

List of Op-Eds by Party Secretaries

1. Cai Qi (蔡奇), Beijing Party secretary, 7/8/2017, People's Daily
2. Li Hongzhong (李鸿忠), Tianjin Party Secretary, 8/8/2017, People's Daily
3. Zhao Kezhi (赵克志), Hebei Party Secretary, 9/8/2017, People's Daily
4. Luo Huining (骆惠宁), Shanxi Party Secretary, 10/8/2017, People's Daily
5. Li Xi (李希), Liaoning Party Secretary, 11/8/2017, People's Daily
6. Bayin Chaolu (巴音朝鲁), Jilin Party Secretary, 14/8/2017, People's Daily
7. Zhang Qingwei (张庆伟), Heilongjiang Party Secretary, 15/8/2017, People's Daily
8. Han Zheng (韩正), Shanghai Party Secretary, 16/8/2017, People's Daily (also member of CCP Politburo)
9. Li Qiang (李强), Jiangsu Party Secretary, 17/8/2017, People's Daily
10. Che Jun (车俊), Zhejiang Party Secretary, 18/8/2017, People's Daily
11. Li Jinbin (李锦斌), Anhui Party Secretary, 21/8/2017, People's Daily
12. You Quan (尤权), Fujian Party Secretary, 22/8/2017, People's Daily
13. Lu Xinshe (鹿心社), Jiangxi Party Secretary, 23/8/2017, People's Daily
14. Liu Jiayi (刘家义), Shandong Party Secretary, 24/8/2017, People's Daily
15. Xie Fuzhan (谢伏瞻), Henan Party Secretary, 25/8/2017, People's Daily
16. Jiang Chaoliang (蒋超良), Hubei Party Secretary, 28/8/2017, People's Daily
17. Du Jiahao (杜家毫), Hunan Party Secretary, 29/8/2017, People's Daily
18. Hu Chunhua (胡春华), Guangdong Party Secretary (also member of CCP Politburo), 30/8/2017, People's Daily
19. Peng Qinghua (彭清华), Guangxi Autonomous Region Party Secretary, 31/8/2017, People's Daily
20. Liu Cigui (刘赐贵), Hainan Party Secretary, 1/9/2017, People's Daily
21. Chen Miner (陈敏尔), Chongqing Party Secretary, 4/9/2017, People's Daily
22. Wang Dongming (王东明), Sichuan Party Secretary, 5/9/2017, People's Daily
23. Chen Hao (陈豪), Yunnan Party Secretary, 6/9/2017, People's Daily
24. Sun Zhigang (孙志刚), Guizhou Party Secretary, 7/9/2017, People's Daily
25. Li Jiheng (李纪恒), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Party Secretary, 8/9/2017, People's Daily
26. Wu Yingjie (吴英杰), Tibet Autonomous Region Party Secretary, 11/9/2017, People's Daily
27. Lou Qinqian (娄勤俭), Shanxi Party Secretary, 12/9/2017, People's Daily
28. Lin Duo (林铎), Gansu Party Secretary, 13/9/2017, People's Daily
29. Wang Guosheng (王国生), Qinghai Party Secretary, 14/9/2017, People's Daily
30. Shi Taifeng (石泰峰), Ningxia Autonomous Region Party Secretary, 15/9/2017, People's Daily
31. Chen Quanguo (陈全国), Xinjiang Autonomous Region Party Secretary, 18/9/2017, People's Daily

Comparison of References to 'Party' and 'Army' in Work Reports to Party Congresses

Party Congress	19th	18th	17th	16th	15th	14th	13th	12th
Party (党)	331	235	234	284	222	230	295	60
Army (军)	86	49	54	46	33	27	13	8

