



**'XI JINPING AND CCP LEADERSHIP WARY OF COLOUR REVOLUTION BEFORE 20<sup>TH</sup> PARTY CONGRESS'**

by JAYADEVA RANADE

Anxiety in the leadership echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of the possibility of a "colour revolution" in China has transparently risen in the past month or so. While Chinese cadres, including Xi Jinping, have harboured such apprehensions since the disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1991, these concerns have increased markedly since the rapid deterioration in relations with the United States. There is growing consensus in China that Beijing and Washington will remain locked in a power competition in the foreseeable future despite the change of leadership in the US. Wang Jisi, President of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University and one of China's top experts on America, stated this January that the rivalry had gone far beyond great-power competition and ideological differences.

2. A clear illustration of this heightened concern was the appearance of an editorial authored by the Ministry of State Security (MoSS) in the People's Daily on April 15. It said "We must be soberly aware that various hostile forces have not stopped...subversion and sabotage of the Party leadership...and are always planning 'colour revolutions' in our country." The editorial asserted that the MoSS is standing firm against: "All kinds of risks and challenges to the Party leadership and the socialist system"; "All kinds of risks and challenges to sovereignty, security, and development interests"; and "All kinds of risks and challenges that endanger China's core interests and major principles". The same day the Global Times published an article warning: "West-backed color revolution a 'top threat' to China's national, political security!"

3. A subsequent editorial in the Global Times (April 19) was more specific. Asserting that the US has supported "colour revolutions" around the world, it described the US as "extremely untrustworthy". The editorial argued "China, as a newly targeted "strategic competitor" of the US, is fortunate that we have witnessed all the colour revolutions in the world in the past 30 years. This is equivalent to having gotten politically vaccinated and received a boost shot to enhance the effectiveness. The Chinese people must protect the fruitful achievements of the People's Republic of China, and remain sober-minded about the US' repeated deceptive clamour that the strategic game between the US and China is a battle between "democracies and autocracies." China must continue to grow its national strength and weaken the ability of the US to pressure it "from a position of strength." China can only be a friend with whom the US has to coexist because it cannot crush."

4. In a related move the Chinese Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), among China's more influential think-tanks and directly subordinate to the MoSS, on April 14 established the 'Research Center for Overall National Security Concept' in Beijing.

5. The People's Daily editorial was reinforced with the release of new anti-espionage regulations by China's Ministry of State Security (MoSS). These were publicised by the People's Daily and Xinhua on April 26, 2021.

6. The new anti-espionage regulations, which became effective immediately, allow the national security authority to draw up lists of a broad range of entities including companies, organisations and,

potentially universities and private businesses, as if they are sensitive government agencies susceptible to foreign infiltration. MoSS officials explained (April 26) that “Overseas espionage and intelligence agencies and hostile forces have intensified their infiltration into China, with more diverse methods and in broader fields, which pose a serious threat to China’s national security and interests.” Stating that “the core and vital areas still have issues such as which organizations bear the primary responsibilities for anti-espionage security and prevention measures that are not institutionalized”, they said the regulations clarify “what, who and how” to guard against foreign espionage. The MoSS will provide companies and organisations susceptible to foreign infiltration with work manuals, guides, and other publicity and education materials. The authorities will also issue written guidance, organize trainings, hold work meetings, and supervise anti-espionage work using different methods.

7. It should normally have been the task of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), responsible for domestic security and counter espionage, to issue such regulations. However, a Party inspection group that was sent into the MPS in late 2020 submitted its report on February 3, where it criticised the MPS for “not doing enough to remove the remaining poison” of the ex-Head of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission Zhou Yongkang and Vice Ministers of Public Security Meng Hongwei and Sun Lijun. A campaign was, thereafter, launched to “cleanse” the country’s security apparatus. A shake-up of the powerful MPS seems to still be underway as indicated by the removal recently of the heads of three powerful law enforcement bodies in Shenzhen.

8. The warning sounded by the Ministry of State Security has been buttressed by China’s Provincial Party Secretaries. They have also in recent weeks been stressing the need for heightened vigilance.

9. Fujian Province Party Secretary Yin Li explained that the security agenda includes protecting governance, ideological security, critical infrastructure, strategic resources and technology etc. Ruan Chengfa, Party Secretary of the border province of Yunnan, wrote a lengthy article captioned 'In-depth practice of the overall national security concept - Build a strong security barrier in the southwest of the motherland', which was published by the People’s Daily on April 22. It praised Xi Jinping for having "creatively put forward the concept of overall national security". The article stressed “We will comprehensively strengthen anti-infiltration, anti-subversion, anti-terrorism, and anti-separatism struggles, strictly prevent and accurately combat infiltration and sabotage activities by foreign hostile forces, and firmly maintain regime security and institutional security.” It referred to border security and said China will "Strengthen the protection of overseas interests and take all measures to protect the safety of our enterprises and personnel in neighboring countries.” Meanwhile, in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) a vigorous campaign has been underway with leaders from Beijing and TAR exhorting local cadres, especially in border prefectures and counties, that “the efforts should centre on safeguarding the country’s unity and strengthening ethnic solidarity, resolutely combating separatism, forestalling and defusing major risks and challenges and continuously consolidate the foundations of long-term peace and stability in Tibet”.

10. Concern about ‘colour revolution’ seems to have been rekindled in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) too. In a publication of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), two PLA officers from the Political College of the National Defense University and the Joint Logistics Support Force Longyan Comprehensive Warehouse Support Team respectively, admitted there are “new challenges to the party's absolute leadership over the army to take root at the grassroots level”. It said “the officers and soldiers of the new era generally lack the training in the severe and complex environment and the baptism of blood and fire on the battlefield” and “often lack understanding and mastery of the party's absolute leadership over the military” and “the extremely deceptive political propaganda of the hostile forces”.

11. Underscoring that it is important “to clear out the fog of thought”, it said “President Xi Jinping pointed out that some Western countries are stepping up instigation of "color revolutions" in our country, stepping up the implementation of online "Cultural Cold War" and "political genetic modification" projects in an attempt to root out our military officers and soldiers and pull the military out of the party banner. The challenges we face in the field of ideology and political security are very serious”. In conclusion the article recommended “as young officers and soldiers of the "media generation", they will inevitably be involved in the struggle of public opinion. This urgently requires us to change our minds, carry out online struggles like a war, and continuously strengthen the ability of officers and soldiers to resist the erosion of social corruption and the infiltration and destruction of hostile forces.”

12. Such a candid article on ideological weakness in the PLA has not been noticed for quite some time. Between 2011-2013, numerous intellectuals, university professors and “liberal” Chinese economists were noticed advocating ‘new liberalism’, calling for political reform and arguing that the PLA should be an army of the State and not subservient to the CCP. The CCP and PLA leadership was troubled by the circulation of this ‘hostile’ foreign-inspired propaganda. A Liberation Army Daily article on June 17, 2012, raised for the first time the issue of factional “sub-loyalties” in the PLA. Promptly thereafter year-long political education campaigns were launched throughout the PLA consecutively. These continue.

13. With the PLA moving to become a technology-based armed force, it started focussing on recruiting high school and college graduates since 2001. Data from China’s Ministry of Education and Xinhua News Agency reveals that by 2019, the total number of high school and college students enlisted in the Army were 1.24 million. The PLA Military Academies also enrol students and in 2018 they enrolled 30,500 students. These college and high school graduates presently comprise the largest single source of recruits. Concern persists in the senior echelons of the PLA that such recruits might have got influenced by “liberal” ideas from their teachers and professors. Consecutive year-long political education campaigns are now being conducted throughout the PLA.

14. Academics and students were prominent in the criticism of Xi Jinping and his policies when the authorities mishandled the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020-2021, Chinese businessmen and intellectuals were also complicit. Though Xi Jinping has cracked down on the critics and many have since been detained or severely penalised, resentment continues to linger below the surface.

15. Accordingly, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) announced (April 28) that in its latest round of “discipline inspections” it will “inspect” 31 universities and the Ministry of Education. ‘The Paper’ (April 28) said that while details of the upcoming inspections have not been released, a priority will be to make sure that university faculty and administrators are loyal CCP members or abide by Party discipline.

16. Warnings of efforts by the US and West to promote colour revolution under the garb of "universal values" are, therefore, being sounded in universities. An article by two Anhui University Professors published in the China Education Daily (May 13) emphasised the importance of "resisting the negative impact of "universal values" on young students”. Describing "universal value" as the “strategic attempt of ideological struggle”, the article explained that the usual tactic is to “slander and vilify other countries at the ideological level under the banner of freedom, democracy, and human rights”. It cautioned that following “the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some Western countries intensified their efforts to promote the so-called "universal values" necessitating “our high vigilance”.

17. A lengthy article in the Global Times (May 16) highlighted these anxieties. Titled 'US embassy increasingly offensive in pushing ‘peaceful evolution’ in China by roping in activists with money', the

article pointed to a recent initiative of the US Embassy in China to "support non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including think tanks, civil society organizations and individuals ... to carry out activities to spread American values and enhance the understanding of the US among the Chinese people, among other objectives. The maximum amount for each award is \$30,000." Li Haidong, Professor at the Institute of International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University, was quoted as warning that this program is being initiated by the US State Department "to propagate and infiltrate all parts of China, including Hong Kong and Macao". He said it provides funding and transfer benefits to "specified individuals" or "organizations" possibly even to instigate a "color revolution". The Global Times said "analysts pointed out that in addition to directly propagandizing Western democracy and its rule of law, it often uses the guise of caring for women's, animal and minority rights to export "color revolution"." It quoted other Chinese experts who claimed that US cultural and other programmes were designed to further "peaceful evolution".

18. The 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) scheduled to be held towards the end of next year, is crucial for incumbent Chinese President Xi Jinping who appears intent on securing China's three top posts for the third time. The run up to the Congress is a sensitive period and the Chinese leadership will be aware that popular resentment, and the opposition to Xi Jinping that exists inside the CCP, could find public expression. China's leadership would also perceive the recently stepped-up US and Western criticism of human rights violations in Xinjiang and Tibet as attempts to fan the existing restiveness in these border provinces. The CICIR and CASS had warned the Politburo in April 2020 of such a possibility. Xi Jinping has visibly started taking steps to counter any such efforts.

-----  
(The author is former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India and is presently President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy.)