



## **China's Central Conference 2018: CPC to Play Greater Role in Foreign Affairs – A Preliminary Analysis**

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The leadership of Communist Party of China (CPC) convened its Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs (hereafter Foreign Affairs Conference) on June 22-23, 2018. The Conference was presided by Premier Li Keqiang and attended by a number of high profile leaders of the country.<sup>1</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is also the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, delivered an 'important' address to the Conference.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Participants of the Conference included: Li Zhanshu, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress; Wang Yang, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; Wang Huning, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau and member of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee; Zhao Leji, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau and Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC Central Committee; Han Zheng, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Vice Premier of the State Council; Yang Jiechi, member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee; and Vice President Wang Qishan.

<sup>2</sup> Note: Full texts of presentations made at the Conference are not yet available.

It may be noted that the CPC leadership had organized the last Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs on November 28-29, 2014. Xi Jinping had delivered an address at that conference as well.<sup>3</sup>

This paper aims to analyze major highlights of Xi Jinping's speech delivered at the 2018 Foreign Affairs Conference. The paper is divided into two sections. The first section lists major highlights of Xi's speech and the second section examines some of the main themes emerging from the highlights.

## I

### **Major highlights of Xi's speech**

President Xi gave a comprehensive speech at the 2018 Foreign Affairs Conference emphasizing on "diplomacy of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era". He underscored the following ten major aspects of thought, which can also be considered as guidelines for Chinese foreign policy under Xi's leadership.

- Uphold the authority of the CPC Central Committee as the overarching principle and strengthen the centralized, unified leadership of the Party on external work.
- Advance major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics to fulfill the mission of realizing national rejuvenation.
- Take preserving world peace and pursuing common development as the purpose to promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.
- Enhance strategic confidence based on socialism with Chinese characteristics.
- Forge ahead with the Belt and Road construction on the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration.
- Follow the path of peaceful development on the basis of mutual respect and win-win cooperation.
- Develop global partnerships while advancing diplomatic agenda.
- Lead the reform of the global governance system with the concept of fairness and justice.
- Take national core interests as the bottom line to safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests.

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from the two Conferences during Xi's leadership (June 2018 and November 2014), Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was held in 2006, 1991 and 1971.

- Nurture a distinctive style of Chinese diplomacy by combining the fine tradition of external work and the characteristics of times.<sup>i</sup>

## II

### Party-Building

Party-building was a highlight of the Foreign Affairs Conference in 2014, Xi had called to “enhance the central and unified leadership of the party, reform and improve institutions and mechanism concerning foreign affairs”.<sup>ii</sup>

The CPC under Xi’s leadership has attached considerable importance to its ‘great project’ of Party-building especially since the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (November 2013). The emphasis was also evident in the Third Plenary Session of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CPC which was held on February 26 –28, 2018. In the past, the Party focused on advancement of Five in One - comprehensively promoting economic construction, political construction, cultural construction, social construction, and ecological civilization. It is noteworthy that the Third Plenum of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CPC added ‘management of Party’ as another/sixth major task.<sup>iii</sup>

While addressing this year’s Foreign Affairs Conference, Xi called for “a strong contingent of foreign affairs personnel that are loyal to the CPC, the country and the people...”. He also noted the importance of “enhancing the party-building in institutions abroad so as to form a management mechanism catering to the requirements of the new era”. He called on “foreign affairs cadres to ...upgrade their competency and overall quality”.<sup>iv</sup> These messages from the top leader of China suggest that foreign affairs cannot be separated from the ongoing domestic discourse in the country. Moreover, measures such as creating foreign affairs personnel loyal to the Party and strengthening Party-building in institutions abroad suggest that sustainability of the Party in long run is at the core of agenda for the current leadership in China.

This can also be understood in the larger perspective of China’s political discourse where Xi has implemented directions of 18<sup>th</sup> as well as 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses which include action against corruption, strengthening of Party and the development of China’s great power ambitions.

### Major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics

By and large, Chinese media including Xinhua highlighted that Xi Jinping urged breaking new grounds in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics during his address to the Foreign Affairs Conference, 2018. He emphasized the need to “advance major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics to fulfill the mission of realizing national rejuvenation”.

In his address to the Foreign Affairs Conference in 2014, Xi had endeavored to build a new model of major country relations. The concept has evolved over time. Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his press conference on the sidelines of the first session of China’s 13<sup>th</sup> National People’s

Congress in March 2018 had outlined the main aims of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics as fostering a new type of international relations, and building a community with a shared future for humanity.<sup>v</sup>

Chinese experts have emphasized that China's major-country diplomacy indicates an increased capability for China to shape the world. Subsequently, China is more active and confident in regional and international affairs.<sup>vi</sup> The speech of Xi Jinping at the 2018 Foreign Affairs Conference makes a clear linkage between China's major country diplomacy and its ambition to realize China dream.

### **Community of common destiny**

President Xi had elaborated his idea of a community of common destiny at Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in March 2015 saying "to build a community of common destiny, we need to make sure that all countries respect one another and treat each other as equals".<sup>4</sup> In his report to the 19th Party Congress, he urged to promote "the building of a community with a shared future for mankind". However, it is noteworthy that the White Paper titled "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation" (Jan 2017) notes: "small and medium-sized countries need not and should not take sides among big countries".<sup>vii</sup> It contradicts the idea of 'community of common destiny'. The issue of sovereign equality is important for all countries.

At the Foreign Affairs Conference 2018, Xi urged to pursue common development as the objective for building a community of common destiny and preserving world peace. Further, he noted that "The major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics will endeavor to build a community with a shared future for mankind."

### **Enhancing strategic confidence**

President Xi stressed on enhancing 'strategic confidence' based on socialism with Chinese characteristics during his speech at the Conference. It suggests that "despite growing uncertainties and strategic pressure, China is confident about the long-term picture of its overall development."<sup>viii</sup> Further, this is in line with the message coming out from the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that China has arrived on the world stage. Various statements by the Chinese leaders after the Party Congress have affirmed this. State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China has "achieved a remarkable transformation - it has stood up, grown rich and is becoming strong. A sea change has taken place in China".<sup>ix</sup> The call to enhance strategic confidence needs to be understood in this background.

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase 'community of common destiny' was first used by President Hu Jintao in the context of cross-straits relations. Reference to this term is available in the reports to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

## China's national core interests

The Chinese discourse on its core interest includes preservation of power in the hands of CPC, and sovereignty and territorial integrity of China as defined by the Chinese state/party. Xi during 2018 Conference, noted to “take national core interests as the bottom line to safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests”.<sup>x</sup> Further, the Conference also suggested “thinking about worst- case scenario and risks”. Thus, the bottom line is that China would not sacrifice its ‘core interests’ to maintain peace.

It is noteworthy that while addressing the 18<sup>th</sup> SCO Summit at Qingdao on June 10, 2018, Xi said: “We should respect each other's choice of development paths and *accommodate each other's core interests* and major concerns”. This is a euphemism for asking others to make concessions to China. Time will tell whether China actually agrees to ‘accommodate’ the core interests of others. Moreover, a clear and proper understanding of China's core interests is important as this factor has greatly influenced China's actions in international affairs.

## Conclusion

President Xi Jinping gave a comprehensive and important speech at the 2018 Foreign Affairs Conference. It can be said that upholding the authority of the CPC Central Committee and strengthening Party leadership in foreign affairs are among the most important aspects of Xi's speech. This is in line with directions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. It is also important to note that major country diplomacy is poised to get more priority in coming days, as this it now directly linked to realizing national rejuvenation as well as to building a community of common destiny.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> “习近平：努力开创中国特色大国外交新局面” available at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c\\_1123025806.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c_1123025806.htm), and “Xi Jinping Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics”, available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1571296.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1571296.shtml)

<sup>ii</sup> “The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was held in Beijing”, available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1215680.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml)

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<sup>iii</sup> Xinhua View point “十九届中央深改组第一次会 四大问题答案都在这” available at <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/nd/2017-11-26/doc-ifypathz6042102.shtml> and “China Focus: 19th CPC Central Committee 3rd Plenum Issues Communiqué”, available at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/01/c\\_137006746\\_2.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/01/c_137006746_2.htm)

<sup>iv</sup> “习近平：努力开创中国特色大国外交新局面” available at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c\\_1123025806.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c_1123025806.htm), “Xi Jinping Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics”, available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1571296.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1571296.shtml)

<sup>v</sup> Xinhua, “Chinese FM highlights diplomatic agenda in 2018”, available at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/08/c\\_137025133.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/08/c_137025133.htm)

<sup>vi</sup> Su Xiaohui, “Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics”, available at [http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2018-03/14/content\\_40251823.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2018-03/14/content_40251823.htm)

<sup>vii</sup> “China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation”, January 2017, available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1429771.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml)

<sup>viii</sup> “Xi’s Thought on Diplomacy hailed”, available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201806/25/WS5b2ffd47a3103349141de728.html>

<sup>ix</sup> Remarks by Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China at the 2018 New Year Reception, MOFA, PRC, January 30, 2018. available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1530525.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1530525.shtml)

<sup>x</sup> “Xi Jinping Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics”, available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1571296.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1571296.shtml)