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on

Understanding China's Political, Economic, and Military Discourse in the aftermath of the 19th Party Congress

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The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held in October 2017 is undoubtedly an extremely important event as it provides “a program of action for the CPC and the most authoritative textbook to understand and approach China”.¹ Following the Party Congress, a number of important meetings were held and important announcements were made pertaining to political, economic, and military discourse of the country. Further, China's top research institutes organized a few symposiums/conferences on the subjects. This paper aims to analyze these meetings and announcements (in the aftermath of the 19th Party Congress) to understand the subject and the debate on important aspects of China's internal dynamics.

I

Political

First Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC (October 2017)

The 19th CPC Central Committee held its first plenary session on October 25, 2017. The session elected Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee for the second term. Stressing that political leadership is the crucial element for maintaining the Central Committee's authority, in his speech at the first plenary session Xi Jinping outlined four guiding principles to keep the Party on the right political track:

- To reinforce (their) ideals and convictions
- To strengthen political responsibility
- To improve our abilities across the board
- To genuinely improve our conduct

Second Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC (January 2018)

The second plenary session was held in Beijing on January 18-19, 2018. During the session, a proposal from the CPC Central Committee on the revision to the Constitution was adopted

and the CPC Central Committee stressed efforts to establish a national supervision system to control everyone working in the public sector.²

Major highlights of the session were:

- Revision to China's Constitution to enshrine Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era
- Reform of the national supervision system to strengthen self-supervision of the Party and the state
- Supremacy and role of the state Constitution
- Building of a community with a shared future for mankind

Two Sessions of the 13th National People's Congress (March 2018)

The 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) began their first annual sessions on March 3 and 5 respectively. The sessions took place four months after the 19th CPC National Congress held on October 18-24, 2017.

Major highlights of the Two Sessions are:

- Enshrining Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the state Constitution
- Revision to a clause concerning the Chinese President's term of office – no limit in future
- Establishment of a national supervisory commission as the highest anti-corruption agency
- Poverty alleviation
- Building a stronger military

In the speech delivered at the closing meeting of the first session of the 13th National People's Congress on March 20, 2018, Xi stated: "The Party is the highest force for political leadership and the fundamental guarantee of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The Party exercises overall leadership over all areas of endeavor in every part of the country."³

Further, Xi noted that the CPC "must have the courage to reform itself, adhere to the Party's commitment to serving the public good and exercising power in the interests of the people, step up strict governance over the Party, resolutely clear all types of inaction and corruption, always have a heart-to-heart communion with the people." He also added that the Party should "always remain ahead of the time" to serve as the backbone of the country and the people.

The 13th NPC has further strengthened Xi Jinping's leadership in China. Xi's speech reiterates the centrality of the Communist Party and also highlights the importance of building trust between the Party and the people through comprehensive and strict governance of the Party.

Third Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC (February 2018)

The Third Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC was held on February 26 – 28, 2018. A Communiqué was issued at the end of the session.⁴

The third plenum of the Central Committee of the CPC generally sets the economic tone for the Chinese government's next five-year term. However, it is evident from the communiqué issued on 28 February 2018 that the CPC has attached immense importance to its project of party building. The plenary session “reviewed and adopted a decision by the CPC Central Committee on deepening reform of Party and state institutions as well as a plan for the reform”⁵. The plenum termed the current international situation complicated amid “heavy domestic tasks of advancing reform and development and maintaining stability”.⁶ The maintenance of stability in China has been cited as an important guarantee for reforms and development by the Chinese leadership from time to time.

In the past the Party highlighted 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 19th Central Committee of the CPC added management of Party as another/sixth major task.

The plenum noted that the country “worked hard to deepen reform in all areas, maintain stable and healthy economic growth, promote law-based governance and the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics’ and acknowledged three critical battles¹ for China, which has been a consistent focus of leadership/Party meeting after the 19th Party Congress.

Deepening Reform of Party and State Institutions

The CPC Central Committee made a decision on deepening reform of Party and state institutions on March 4, 2018. Later, it released a plan on deepening reform of Party and state institutions on March 21, 2018.⁷ The reform plan covers the following institutions and aspects:

- Deepen reform of CPC Central Committee institutions
- Deepen reform of the National People's Congress (NPC) institutions
- Deepen reform of State Council institutions
- Deepen reform of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee
- Deepen reform of the administrative law enforcement system
- Deepen military-civilian reform

Overall, the deeper reform of Party and State Institutions is aimed at “promoting the modernization of the system and capacity for governance of the State.”⁸ China is working on

¹ Three critical battles are: a) preventing and resolving the major risks, (b) conducting targeted poverty reduction, and (c) controlling pollution.

making the system “suitable for implementing the five-sphere integrated plan² and the four-pronged comprehensive strategy³.” This plan is preparation for the hard work needed for achieving the two centennial goals.

The major objectives of the reform initiative include establishing efficiency, law-based governance, coordinated actions, overall leadership of the Party, enhancing the status of leadership of Party organizations among organizations of the same level, and advancing reform of the Party’s disciplinary inspection and the country’s supervisory systems. To facilitate Party supervision, China has established the national supervisory commission (NSC) on March 23, 2018.

On March 28, 2018, Xi Jinping presided over the first meeting of the Central Committee for deepening overall reform. He noted: “The launch of deeper reform of the Party and state institutions marks a new stage for deepening reform in all areas.”⁹ As the reform become more complex, sensitive and onerous, he called for strengthening and improving Party coordination and leadership over deepening reform in all areas. The meeting also discussed a report on deepening reform of the disciplinary inspection and supervision system and the institutions of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the national supervisory commission.

At the 2nd meeting of the Central Committee for deepening overall reform held on May 11, 2018, Xi Jinping called for “coordinated efforts and orderly progress in the planning and implementation of institutional reform at the central and local levels to ensure complete victory in the area.”¹⁰

At the 3rd meeting of the Central Committee for deepening overall reform held on July 6, 2018, Xi Jinping announced that “the CPC Central Committee has launched major reforms of overall importance, and significant new progress has been made in comprehensively deepening reform” since the 19th CPC National Congress.”¹¹ He also stressed the need for more efforts to tackle key difficult issues, invigorate the system, use the experiences from the primary level and inspire cadres to push reform deeper.

Great New Project of Party Building

When presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on April 23, 2018, Xi Jinping urged Party members to “stay true to our founding mission,” always put the people in the most prominent place in their hearts, work hard for the people’s interests and happiness, and promote well-rounded human development and all-round social progress.¹² Xi called for commitment to safeguarding and promoting China’s development interests, and opening wider to the outside world. Regarding the role and responsibility of the CPC, Xi highlighted the following issues:

² The five-sphere integrated plan is to promote coordinated economic, political, cultural, social and ecological advancement.

³ The four-pronged comprehensive strategy is to make comprehensive moves to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, deepen reform, advance law-based governance, and strengthen Party self-governance.

- The Party must carry forward the spirit of reforming itself to lead the people in the great social revolution and achieve national rejuvenation
- The Party must not waver in its determination, lower the requirement or cut the efforts in ensuring full and strict governance over the Party.
- The Party must always preserve its character of a Marxist governing party, always remain ahead of the time, and always be the backbone of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation.

On June 29, 2018, when presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping stressed the importance of the Party's political building. Expressing the significance of political work of the Party, Xi noted: "Political direction is the top priority concerning the survival and development of the Party, and it determines the future of the Party and the cause."¹³ He also underlined the importance of people's support, a sound political ecosystem, combating corruption and appealed to the Party officials to "guard against political risks".

At China's National Conference on Organisational Work held on July 3-4, 2018, Xi called on the whole party to implement the Party's organizational line for the new era and make the Party stronger. He also said the Party requires efforts to break new ground in "the great new project of Party building."

On building a strong CPC, Xi Jinping made the following remarks:

- The Party must have the courage to carry out self-reform to make it stronger
- Foster competent officials who are loyal to the Party, have moral integrity, and demonstrate a keen sense of responsibility
- Attract excellent, patriotic and devoted people to join the Party
- Adhere to the principle of selecting officials on the basis of both integrity and ability, with priority given to integrity, and on the basis of merit regardless of background
- Efforts to comprehensively implement general requirements for Party building in the new era and continue to improve the efficacy of Party building
- Build the Party into a vibrant Marxist governing party that is always at the forefront of the times, enjoys the wholehearted support of the people, has the courage to reform itself, and is able to withstand all tests
- Enhance the Party's organizations in enterprises, rural areas, governments, public institutions and urban communities.
- Develop a good system to train, select, manage and assign officials
- Enhance internal supervision and develop a system to oversee officials concerning their faith, performance, working style and integrity

Again, on July 12, 2018, Xi Jinping gave an instruction to a meeting about political building in the central and state organs, to safeguard the authority and centralised, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee. According to a statement issued after the

meeting, Xi had asked central and state organs to adhere to the right political direction, strictly observe the Party's political discipline and rules, take intra-Party political life seriously, and fully implement the CPC Central Committee's decisions and plans.¹⁴

II

Economic

Leadership Small Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform (November 2017)

The Leadership Small Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform was held on 20 November 2017. The meeting stressed that China must study and carry out the spirit of the 19th Party Congress and promote 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era', consolidate the direction of reforms, and continue to make co-ordination and reform in all fields¹⁵. The meeting discussed measures to comprehensively deepen the reform and acknowledged that the reform situation requires tough efforts.

Politburo Meeting, (December 2017)

The Politburo of the CPC Central Committee held a meeting on December 8, 2017. The meeting was chaired by President Xi Jinping. The meeting highlighted that "high-quality development should be the guiding philosophy of development ideas, economic policies and macroeconomic control measures in the long term". Further, the meeting also listed efforts for curbing financial risks, eradicating poverty and fighting pollution as three top economic priorities for China.

In his report to the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping stressed that China faces the contradiction between unbalanced, inadequate development and the people's ever-growing demand for a better life. Some Chinese experts have argued that China should pursue high-quality development to "adapt to the new principal contradiction". Shi Jianxun (Director, Institute of Finance and Economics at Tongji University) noted that "Pursuing high-quality development offers the solution to balance and inadequacy".¹⁶ His definitions of high quality development includes: supply-side structural reform; reducing pollution and energy consumption per unit GDP; and reducing and eliminating the gap between different regions, areas and groups as well as between urban and rural areas.

Central Economic Work Conference (December 2017)

By and large, the Central Economic Work Conference held on 18-20 December 2017, repeated the message of the Politburo meeting. However, it provided a list of eight policy objectives: (i) Xi Jinping's thought on socialist economy, (ii) High-quality development, (iii) Adopting a prudent and neutral monetary policy and a proactive fiscal policy, (iv) Forestalling financial risks, (v) Housing system, encouraging both purchase and renting, (vi) Focus on targeted poverty reduction measures, (vii) Pollution prevention and (viii) Boosting imports for balanced trade.¹⁷

High-quality development was highlighted as the "indispensable foundation for sustainable and healthy economic development"¹⁸. It is important to note that the Conference declared "to increase imports and reduce import tariffs on "some products to

promote balanced trade as part of its effort to push forward a new pattern of all-round opening up”¹⁹. However, mechanisms for such plans have not been announced. Uncertainty remains over the details of the plans and how they will be implemented.

Symposium on the Situation and Prospects of China’s Economic Diplomacy (January 2018)

A symposium on the ‘Situation and Prospects of China’s Economic Diplomacy under the Framework of the New Model of International Relations’ was held in Beijing on 7 January 2018. The meeting is also known as the annual conference of the Society of Economic Diplomacy at the China National Association for International Studies (CNAIS).²⁰ The symposium highlighted China’s achievements in economic diplomacy. It termed the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in May 2017 as “a high-level, large-scale multilateral diplomatic event for rebalancing economic globalization”.²¹

In the era of economic slowdown in China, the Belt and Road Initiative is aimed to create new markets and get economic benefits by building infrastructure (road, railways etc) and industrial corridors and establishing industrial complexes along the ports/hubs and build transportation and communications networks. A recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, Washington DC) noted that out of all the contractors participating in Chinese-funded transportation projects (tracked by the CSIS), 89 percent are Chinese companies.²² Therefore, creating new market for Chinese companies could be seen as one of the major goals from the Chinese perspective.

Further, the symposium noted scientific and technological innovation as an important new element of Chinese economic diplomacy and argued that innovation should be a priority of economic diplomacy in the new era. Reports suggest that of late ‘innovation’ has also become a new ‘key word’ of China’s bilateral cooperation with other countries.⁴

China at the World Economic Forum (January 2018)

Liu He (a Harvard-trained economist who is known for advising President Xi Jinping) delivered an important speech titled “Pursue High Quality Development, Work Together for Global Economic Prosperity and Stability” at Davos on 24 January 2018. He noted that “China’s economy has been transitioning for a phase of rapid growth to one of high quality development” and highlighted that China’s “transition to a new model of development will create huge opportunities for many new industries”. Liu He noted that “China will further integrate with international trade rules and ease market access”.²³ However, details are still awaited, for example, which areas will face restrictions in the unified negative list.²⁴ It is hoped that China will take some concrete measures to guarantee reciprocal trade and market access to Indian companies as well.

⁴ In January 2017, China and Switzerland agreed to establish a strategic innovative partnership. China and Israel announced an innovative comprehensive partnership in March 2017 and in June, China and Germany agreed to strengthen cooperation on innovation.

The role of China's emerging middle class has been an issue of debate in the country. Liu He stated that a fast growing middle class population of 400 million people will contribute to domestic market and global development. Some well known Chinese economists such as Prof. Cai Fang had argued that the middle income domestic group is replacing exports as a growth factor in China. It is expected that more than 800 million people will gradually fall in this middle income domestic group as customers. So the middle income group could be fundamental to economic sustainability in China. Some other experts have also noted that Chinese economy is increasingly becoming a consumer-based economy.²⁵ However, it is noteworthy that "The major part of the problem within China arises from the desire of people who have achieved economic prosperity to aspire for and acquire spiritual, religious and political freedom. The challenge before the Communist Party of China is to ensure that such freedoms can be provided without necessarily breaking the iron hold of the Communist Party on the governance of China".²⁶ This has been an issue of debate as the objective of the CPC is to retain power while wealthy middle class may aspire for freedom and democracy.

Sixth Forum of Industrial Development in China (February 2018)

The "Sixth Forum of Industrial Development in China" was held in Beijing. The Forum was hosted by the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The Forum highlighted that the "quality of real economy should be improved from the aspects of industry, enterprise and product to promote a transformation of China's real economy from big to strong."²⁷

The Forum noted that (a) the disposal of the "zombie enterprises" should be combined with efforts to cultivate world-class enterprises, (b) the environment for innovation and development also needs to be improved, (c) the overall quality of enterprises needs be enhanced, (d) it is necessary to strengthen the innovation and management system, and (e) there is a need to enhance the added value and quality of the products.²⁸

Government Work Report (March 2018)

Premier Li Keqiang delivered the annual Government Work Report on March 5, 2018 at the opening meeting of the First Session of the 13th National People's Congress. He stressed that 2018 is a crucial year for securing a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all aspects. He acknowledged that "the tasks for economic and social development in 2018 are formidable" and highlighted the following tasks in his report.

- Stepping up supply-side structural reform
- Moving faster to make China a country of innovators
- Deepening reforms in fundamental and key area
- Fighting three critical battles
- Making strong moves in the rural revitalization strategy
- Making solid progress in the coordinated regional development strategy
- Actively increasing consumption and promoting effective investment
- Creating a new landscape in all-around opening-up

- Doing more to ensure and improve people's well-being

Premier Li also announced the following projected targets for the year 2018.

- GDP growth of around 6.5 percent
- CPI increase of around 3 percent
- Over 11 million new urban Jobs
- Basic parity in personal income growth and economic growth
- A steady rise in import and export volumes, and a basic equilibrium in balance of payments
- A drop of at least 3 percent in energy consumption per unit of GDP
- Substantive progress in supply-side structural reform

Premier Li noted "It now remains a game-changing move for us to achieve China's two centenary goals." Further, he stated that reforms will be advanced in SOEs. He also maintained that reforms introducing mixed ownership in SOEs will be carried forward prudently. Under the direction of 19th Party Congress, China plans to create bigger and stronger SOEs that are capable of competing globally. However, SOEs can be considered as the biggest interest group in China. Hence, structural changes are very difficult to make so far as SOEs are concerned.

Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2018

The Annual Conference of Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) was held on 8-11 April, 2018 at Boao, on the theme "An Open and Innovative Asia for a World of Greater Prosperity". Chinese President Xi Jinping made following announcement while delivering a keynote address.

- China will significantly lower the import tariffs for vehicles and reduce import tariffs for some other products in 2018.
- China will adopt policies to promote high-standard liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment, and explore the opening of free trade ports with Chinese characteristics.
- China will strengthen protection of intellectual property rights.
- China will improve the investment environment for foreign investors
- China will launch a number of landmark measures this year to significantly broaden its market access

In sum, Xi Jinping used BFA to make a number of announcements to take forward his economic agenda.

New negative list for foreign investment in FTZs (June 2018)

China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) jointly released on 28 June 2018, the Special Administrative Measures on Access to Foreign Investment (the 2018 Nationwide Negative List) which will take into effect on 28 July 2018. ²⁹The Negative List is a list of industries in which foreign investment is either prohibited or restricted.

At the national level, “the Special Administrative Measures on Access to Foreign Investment 2018” (the Negative List) will replace the previous “Catalogue for the Guidance of Foreign Investment Industries” from July 28, 2018, the Negative List will reduce the number of restrictive measures from 63 in the previous version to 48.

Additionally, “the Special Administrative Measures for Foreign Investment Access to Pilot Free Zones (Negative List)” (the FTZ Negative List), which will apply within China’s free trade zones, will reduce restrictive measures from 95 to 45.

China media has highlighted following changes in the negative list:

- The foreign equity limit on companies breeding new varieties of wheat and corn, and producing seeds, will be relaxed from the current 49 percent to 66 percent.
- Restrictions on joint ventures or foreign cooperation in exploration and exploitation of petroleum and natural gas will be removed.
- The list also eased restrictions in the cultural sector, as foreign investors will be allowed to own a majority stake in performing arts agencies.³⁰

A detailed summary of the key revisions under the 2018 Nationwide Negative List and the 2018 FTZ Negative List prepared by a London-based multinational law consultancy firm is attached as Annexure 1.

New comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zones (July 2018)

China has newly identified 22 cities as venues for comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in an effort to boost cross-border e-commerce, promote opening-up and upgrade foreign trade, the State Council announced on 13 July 2018.

New pilot zones will be established in 22 cities, namely - Beijing, Hohhot, Shenyang, Changchun, Harbin, Nanjing, Nanchang, Wuhan, Changsha, Nanning, Haikou, Guiyang, Kunming, Xi’an, Lanzhou, Xiamen, Tangshan, Wuxi, Weihai, Zhuhai, Dongguan and Yiwu.

Premier Li noted that “Our firm commitment to opening-up and efforts to bring forward the development of cross-border e-commerce and other new forms of business and increase imports and exports will better place us to meet the needs of upgraded consumption and overall development”.

A note on Three Critical Battles

The three critical battles which China has highlighted in recent past are: (a) preventing and resolving the major risks, (b) conducting targeted poverty reduction, and (c) controlling pollution. The priority for the Chinese government is to deal with these three issues.

First, China needs to resolve major risks in China's economy, including financial risks. Shadow banking and hidden debt for local governments are serious problems.

Second, China has set a target to eliminate absolute poverty in three years. China aims to complete the building of a “moderately prosperous society in all respects” by 2020.

However, China faces serious challenges in this area. Wang Yang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee stressed that “the quality and effectiveness of China’s battle against poverty should be enhanced”, while presiding over a meeting of the State Council leading group on poverty relief and development. Further, he stated that poverty relief work must be improved by targeting problems.

Third, China is paying a high environmental price for its development, which is now becoming increasingly obvious. China plans to scale up pollution control to substantially cut the total emissions of major pollutants and lower the intensity of resource consumption in the next three years.³¹ The focus on green development may help China as past economic practices have caused serious damage to the environment and aggravated pollution in China. Recent data provided by government authorities suggest more investment by the government. In the first half 2018, the investment in the management of ecological protection and treatment of environment pollution increased by 35.4 percent year on year basis.³²

III Military

The 19th CPC National Congress on Military Reform

In the new era under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China is working toward the objective of “a strong country with a strong military”.³³ The Chinese armed forces are meant to safeguard the rule of the CPC. It is the Party’s armed forces. The new wave of military reforms is directed towards centralization of the Party’ control over all the armed forces including the People’s Armed Police Force (PAPF) and the Coast Guard.

The Report delivered at the 19th National Congress of the CPC (henceforth the Report) on October 18, 2017, underscores the Party’s leadership and efforts to build powerful armed forces to meet the challenges in the new era. The Report underscores the need for building “a strong country with strong military” to confront the changes in China’s national security environment. The Report reveals China efforts to “adapt to the trend of a new global military revolution”, upgrade its military capabilities, complete mechanization of the military by 2020 and enhance application of IT in military modernization. China has set the goal of completing modernization of its national defence and armed forces by 2035 and transforms its armed forces into world-class forces by 2050.

The modernization process includes Party building in the military. In this regard, the Report mentions strengthening of Party building in the military. In an implicit reference to the Gutian Conference of 1929, the Report talks about the theme of “passing on the traditions of revolution; stepping up to the task of making the military strong.”

It may be noted that China convened the Gutian Conference 2014 on October 31, 2014 on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the 1929 Gutian Conference as part of anti-corruption campaign in the military and strengthen political loyalty of the military. The

1929 Gutian Conference enshrined the principle of CPC control of the military as a core doctrine and underscored the significance of the military's political work.

On deepening national defence and military reform, the Report indicates new measures in various aspects such as recruitment of civilian personnel in the military and better training of the personnel. Moreover, China underscores that “technology is the core combat capability” and, therefore encourages innovations in military technologies.

Despite such measures, corruption and decadence in the armed forces have been the major targets of the reforms. The Report says: “We will govern the military with strict discipline in every respect, push for a fundamental transformation in the way our military is run, and strengthen the role of rule of law in enhancing national defence and military capabilities.”

The Resolution of the 19th CPC National Congress on the Revised Constitution of the CPC clarifies that the “Chairperson of the Central Military Commission (CMC) assumes overall responsibility over the work of the Commission and that the CMC is responsible for Party work and political work in the armed forces.”³⁴ It is to ensure that the CMC fulfills its responsibility for Party self-supervision and self-governance after the military reform. The 19th CPC National Congress has reaffirmed the criticality of the Party's absolute leadership over the military.

The Chinese Ministry of Defence (MOD) statement issued on October 26, 2017 provides a brief introduction on how the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and PAPF are studying and implementing the spirit of the Congress.

The statement says: “A wave of studying and implementing the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress is now sweeping across the Chinese PLA and the Armed Police Force. We will resolutely implement the decisions and the deployments of the CPC Central Committee, the CMC, and President Xi, and take the lead in earnestly studying and implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

In the aftermath of the 19th CPC National Congress, the guiding principles, ideology and strategy of the Chinese military have been Xi Jinping Thinking on Strengthening the Chinese Military, political loyalty, strengthening the armed forces through reform and technology and running the military in accordance with the law. These measures have further strengthened the leadership position of Xi Jinping in political work and military reform in China.

Important military-related developments after the 19th CPC National Congress:

- The South Sea Fleet of the Chinese PLA Navy has established a new marine rescue squadron in October 2017.
- In November 2017, the CMC released a guideline stating that the military must follow the absolute leadership of the CPC and should be absolutely loyal, honest and reliable to President Xi Jinping.

- The PAPF is put under the command of the CPC Central Committee and the CMC from January 1, 2018. It was previously under the dual command structure of the CMC and the State Council.
- In January 2018, the CMC approved a new training guideline for the military which follows Xi Jinping's thought on building a strong army
- A new regulation on full-time inspection teams to supervise Party committees of the CMC, the army, navy, air force, rocket force, strategic support force and the PAPF took effect on January 15, 2018.
- The Ministry of Veteran Affairs was officially established on April 16, 2018 to handle the issues of the veterans in the wake of protests by the former military personnel
- General office of the CMC made public a guideline on an educational campaign in the military on March 16, 2018.
- The CMC issued three regulations on the military's interior order, code of conduct and military formation which came into effect on May 1, 2018.
- During a visit to the PLA Academy of Military Science on May 16, 2018, Xi Jinping stressed accelerating the development of modern military science, building high-level military research institutions, innovations in military research, defense technology and the organization model of military research to support the building of a strong military in the new era.
- On June 11, 2018, a new guideline was unveiled to stop all commercial activities of the military before the end of the year.
- The Chinese Coast Guard was also brought under the CMC as a division under the PAPF from July 1, 2018. Earlier it functioned under the leadership of State Oceanic Administration.
- On November 10, 2017, China had revised a regulation on civilian personnel in the military and subsequently, the Political Work Department of the CMC issued an announcement in July 2018 on the recruitment of civilian staff through public examination

The First Session of the 13th National People's Congress

The first session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) commenced on March 5, 2018. During the session, Xi called for building a world-class military under the absolute leadership of the CPC. The defence budget submitted to the NPC session was \$175 billion, an increase by 8.1 per cent, up from 7 per cent in 2017.

China announced the plan to establish a Ministry of Veteran Affairs during the session.³⁵ China has over 57 million veterans and the number has been growing each year. Also, the downsizing of the military by 300,000 has contributed to demonstrations by demobilized troops in China.³⁶ On June 24, 2018, a five-day protest by demobilized soldiers was put to an end in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province.³⁷

The Defence Ministry's Regular Press Conference on March 29, 2018 says: "The establishment of the department is to maintain the legitimate rights and interests of the military personnel and their families, strengthen the building of the service and support

system for veterans, build and optimize a concentrated, integrated, and well-defined service and support system for veterans, so as to make the military a better respected career in China.”

With approval from the CMC, the CMC General Office has released a notice, asking the military to “earnestly study the spirit of the 1st Session of the 13th NPC, particularly, the important remarks made by President Xi at the plenary meeting of the PLA and the Armed Police delegation to the 13th NPC and President Xi’s important remarks at the closing ceremony of the NPC.”³⁸

Moreover, the notice asks for “unified thinking, action and pace to enhance the consciousness of politics, the idea of the overall situation, the consciousness of upholding the CPC leadership as the core and keeping alignment; and to firmly maintain the authority of the CPC Central Committee, the core and the CMC Chairman responsibility system.”

At the plenary meeting of the delegation of PLA and PAPF held on March 12, 2018, Xi Jinping stressed the importance of deepening military-civilian integration. He said: “Implementing the strategy of military-civilian integration is a prerequisite for building integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities and for realizing the Party’s goal of building a strong military in the new era.”³⁹

Xi also called for promotion of military development featuring “higher quality, efficiency, and scientific and technological levels”. He asserts that “coordinated sci-tech innovation in key areas between the military and civilian sectors” is required to occupy the strategic high ground in terms of sci-tech innovation.

Moreover, Xi ordered the military to firmly support the reform of the Party and the state institutions and ensure well implementation of the reform tasks concerning both the military and civilian sectors. Xi also called for strengthening the efforts to build the system of rule of law in the military, asked the members of the armed forces to uphold the Constitution, and be its loyal supporter, active follower, and firm defender.

The Work Report delivered at the First Session of the 13th NPC on March 5, 2018 also mentions development of a military strategy for new conditions, convening the Gutian military political work meeting, political loyalty of the military, strengthening the military through reform and technology and for it to be run in accordance with law.

The Report also mentions major missions undertaken by the Chinese military to protect maritime rights, counter terrorism, maintenance of stability, disaster rescue and relief, international peacekeeping, anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and humanitarian rescue. It also affirmed completion of reducing military personnel by 300,000, modernization of military equipment and deepening of the military-civilian integration.⁴⁰

On military reforms, the speech delivered by Xi Jinping at the NPC closing meeting on March 20, 2018 stressed “absolute leadership of the CPC over the people’s armed forces

and fully implement the Party's thinking on strengthening the military for the new era.” Xi called for efforts to enhance the political loyalty of the armed forces, strengthen the military reform and technological advancement and establish law-based governance of the military.

Military Training

Strengthening military training is an important aspect of the military reforms in China. Stating that a military is built to fight, the 19th CPC National Congress report also talks about enhancing combat capability and combat readiness. The emphasis is on winning war.

The Report the 19th CPC National Congress states that China will take steps to “ensure military preparedness for all strategic directions, and make progress in combat readiness in both traditional and new security fields.” The document also mentions development of “new combat forces and support forces”, conducting “military training under combat conditions”, “combat capabilities for joint operations based on the network information system” and the “ability to fight under multi-dimensional conditions”.

Defence Ministry statement issued on November 30, 2017 also listed eight aspects of military training and tasks in the year 2018.⁴¹ They are as follows:

First, to deepen the research in operations-related issues and guide training with advanced military theories;

Second, to keep an eye on the adjustment of the international strategic landscape and the evolution of the security situation in China’s periphery;

Third, to conduct training in strict accordance with the law and the Outline of Military Training and Evaluation (OMTE);

Fourth, to adapt to the restructuring of national defense and the military;

Fifth, to lay a solid foundation for the combat effectiveness of troops;

Sixth, to strictly temper troops according to the requirements of a real combat;

Seventh, to promote exchanges and cooperation with other countries on training;

Eighth, to make efforts to improve military training conditions.

In this context, the CMC held its 2018 “start training” mobilization ceremony on January 3, 2018.⁴² At the ceremony, Xi Jinping ordered the military to strengthen combat readiness and put military training in a strategic position. More than 4,000 parallel sessions were held simultaneously across China among the PLA Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, Strategic Support Force and the PAPF via live television broadcast. Training is focused on comprehensive ground and air joint operations. It marks the beginning of a new training system across all the five theatre commands and abroad.

The ceremony also underscores the leadership of Xi Jinping on all military affairs in China. It demonstrated the new norm of military training after the 19th CPC National Congress and it also reminds the military that the world is not peaceful and crisis awareness for the military needs to be increased.⁴³

Civil-Military Integration (CMI)

Integrating military with civilian purposes and combining military efforts with civilian support are being undertaken at greater pace. The 19th CPC National Congress Report mentions “greater civilian-military integration.” The white paper entitled ‘China’s Military Strategy’ issued in May 2015 provides greater details of the policy.

The white paper says that China will provide stronger policy support to “establish uniform military and civilian standards for infrastructure, key technological areas and major industries, explore the ways and means for training military personnel in civilian educational institutions, developing weaponry and equipment by national defense industries, and outsourcing logistics support to civilian support systems.”

In October 2017, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) signed an agreement with five civilian companies to upgrade civil-military logistics integration.⁴⁴ The five companies are SF Express, China Railway Express, China Postal Express & Logistics, Deppon Logistics and JD Logistics. The PLAAF and the civilian companies will join hands in transportation and distribution, storage management, supplies, purchasing and others.

In January 2018, the logistics department of the PLAAF conducted the first joint logistics support drill in Yunnan and Shaanxi provinces with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from two civilian companies.⁴⁵ The exercises involved delivery of spare parts for damaged radar and anti-toxic serum for a snakebite soldier under simulated conditions of war. It involved UAVs from two civilian companies namely, the SF Express and Jingdong Express.

The ‘Plan on Deepening Reform of Party and State Institutions’⁴⁶ released by CPC on March 21, 2018 recommended the following steps for deepening military-civilian reform:

- Separate the border police from the PAPF;
- Separate the fire brigade from the PAPF;
- Separate the police guards from the PAPF;
- Change the administration of coast guards from the State Oceanic Administration to the PAPF;
- The PAPF no longer administer the gold, forest, hydro-electric forces;
- The PAPF no longer take on duties at the customs.

According to the Chinese Defence Ministry statement issued on June, 2018, the PAPF troops that performed civil-related duties including gold, forestry and hydropower have been transferred to the Ministry of Emergency Management, Ministry of Natural Resources and the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council.⁴⁷ The transfer will be completed by the end of this year. As part of the restructuring, the firefighting force of the PAPF has been brought under the new Ministry of Emergency Management.

Affirming the progress made in civil-military integration, on March 29, 2018, the Defense Ministry of China stated that the organizational structure, overall strategic

guidance, planning and coordination have been greatly strengthened.⁴⁸ Moreover, the statement underscores the steady progress made in key areas, formulation of relevant legislations and implementation of priority projects.

Moreover, to deepen civil-military integration, the statement issued by the Defence Ministry of China on March 29, 2018, emphasized making efforts on the following four aspects:

- To enhance strategic guidance.
- To promote reform and innovation.
- To enhance civil-military coordination.
- To strengthen implementation.

On June 28, 2018, the PLA carried out a drill in Tibet to test their logistics, armament support capabilities and military-civilian integration. The vast territory, difficult terrain, higher altitude and lack of robust infrastructure continue to haunt the Western Theatre Command in China.

Maritime Power Ambition

China's military modernisation and reform proposals are continuously pushing for strengthening the PLA Navy. As part of armed forces development in critical security domains, the 2015 defence white paper, entitled 'China's Military Strategy' says: "It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with its national security and development interests, safeguard its national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, protect the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests, and participate in international maritime cooperation, so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power".⁴⁹ The document also underscores China's efforts to make the PLA Navy gradually shift its focus from "offshore waters defense" to the combination of "offshore waters defense" with "open seas protection" under the new situation.

China's Military Strategy 2015 says that China should abandon the traditional mentality that "land outweighs sea" and "develop a modern maritime military force" toward building China into a maritime power. The PLA Navy is working towards enhancing "its capabilities for strategic deterrence and counterattack, maritime maneuvers, joint operations at sea, comprehensive defence and comprehensive support".

Under the Civil-Military Integration policy, China is working towards making military and civilian resources "more compatible, complementary and mutually accessible."⁵⁰ China is also working on strengthening the PLA Navy's capability to move forces and materials for missions away from shores through ships taken up from trade (STUFT).

The Chinese government had issued orders for civilian shipbuilders to ensure container ships, roll-on/roll-off, multipurpose, bulk carrier and break-bulk cargo carriers to be made technically compliant for wartime use. In June 2015, a meeting was held in

Shanghai between the military and civilian shipping companies to ensure technical standardisation of new civilian ships to meet the national defence requirements.⁵¹

Logistics and equipment support are essential for conducting operations overseas and on open seas. China is lacking in this at present. In addition to landing ships, China is developing dual-use semi-submersible vessels to improve its amphibious combat capability, maintenance and logistics support during open sea tasks.⁵²

In July 2015, the Chinese Navy commissioned its first semi-submersible ship 'Donghaidao' into its South China Sea Fleet.⁵³ China has also built the world's second largest semi-submersible 'Xin Guang Hua' which has entered into service in December 2016 as part of COSCO's shipping fleet. A heavy lift vessel named 'Zhen Hua 33' was commissioned in March 2017. The representatives from the Wuxi Joint Logistic Support Centre declared the vessel to have met military requirements.⁵⁴

The importance of navy is increasing in China's overall strategy. China is downsizing the Army and increasing the number of its Marine Corps.⁵⁵ China has tested a new propulsion system to reduce noise of submarines.⁵⁶ In addition to the already existing marine rescue squadron of the North China Sea Fleet, the South of China Sea Fleet has set up a new marine rescue squadron in October 2017.⁵⁷ Besides, Beijing has been expanding its naval presence in critical points along the maritime sea routes in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Important developments in this direction include establishment of the Djibouti base and the increasing foray of the PLA Navy into the Indian Ocean. By passing through the Sunda and Lombok straits, the PLA Navy has conducted drills near Christmas Island of Australia in the Eastern Indian Ocean in 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Conclusion

Party/State in China has made important announcements pertaining to economic, political and military aspects under the direction of the 19th Party Congress. This helps in understanding following important aspects of China's internal dynamics.

Political

In his report to the 18th Party Congress, Hu Jintao noted "If we fail to handle this issue (corruption) well, it could prove fatal to the Party, and even cause the collapse of the Party and the fall of the state". This shows seriousness attached to the problem. The anti corruption campaign has been carried forward with greater focus by the sixth generation of the leadership.⁵ The Party has also established a national supervision system to control the affairs of the public sector.

The Party documents have highlighted "four dangers" facing the Party. These are lost vitality, insufficient capacity, alienation from the people and rampant corruption. The CPC under Xi's leadership has attached major importance to its 'great project' of Party-

⁵ However, there has been a perception that this campaign is politically motivated and this has been used to neutralize/ penalize some factions/groups within the CPC

building to overcome these dangers. The emphasis was much evident in various party/leadership meetings held in the aftermath of the 19th Party Congress. After all, the Party has been recognized as the highest force for political leadership and the fundamental guarantee for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. All these efforts are aimed at addressing various issues, especially corruption in the system to strengthen the trust and relations between the Party and the people.

Economic

The Report of the 19th CPC National Congress stressed that “the principal contradiction facing Chinese society in the new era is that between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life”. The leadership/Party meetings in the aftermath of the 19th Party Congress have consistently highlighted China’s quest for high quality development as well as new plans, such as boosting imports and easing market access. Further, these meetings have also consistently highlighted “three critical battles” for China. The priority for the Chinese government is to deal with following three issues: (a) preventing and resolving the major risks including financial risks, (b) conducting targeted poverty reduction, and (c) controlling pollution.

The role of middle income domestic group in China has also been increasingly acknowledged as a growth factor replacing exports. It is noteworthy that the symposium/conference organised by China’s top research institutes have highlighted the problematic issues related to SOEs as well as the innovation and management system of China. Obviously, the challenges to achieve a sustainable and environment friendly growth in China are much evident although Chinese economy grew 6.9 percent, above the official target of near 6.5 percent for 2017.

Military

China is set to build a strong military for a strong China under the leadership of Xi Jinping. As the Chinese military is the Party’s military, military modernisation process also involves strengthening Party’s control over all the armed forces. China is working on completing mechanisation of its armed forces by 2020. China has set the goal of completing modernization of its national defence and armed forces by 2035 and transform its armed forces into world-class forces by 2050. Since January 2018, the Chinese military has been instructed to enhance its combat capability, preparedness to win war and advance military reform through innovation, technology and military research. At the same time, China is building a strong CPC to manage the internal and external challenges which can threaten its political position by strengthening its control over the armed forces. The Party Central Committee is also undertaking restructuring of the PAPF. During this period, China has also demonstrated some progress in the field of civil-military integration in various dimensions.

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

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