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The 20th Party Congress — Xi at the 'Core'

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By Dr. Amrita Jash



The 20th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) [中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会], held October 16–22, was the most anticipated event in China and abroad. With the goal of reorganizing the country's leadership and defining its political and policy objectives, the Party Congress solidified Xi Jinping's third term and, more importantly, his supreme control in China by promoting his allies and cadres and getting rid of the factions.

China's constitution makes the National Party Congress the CCP's supreme authority. The CCP has the monopoly, but the leadership's political infrastructure does not. As a result, China's leadership until the 19th Party Congress fluctuated between two CCP factions, unlike under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. First, the "elitist coalition" is made up of "princes" at its core—those who come from families of either veteran revolutionaries or high-ranking officials. And second, the "populist coalition," which mainly consisted of "tuanpai (团派)," or those associated with the Communist Youth League (CYL), This

made China's domestic political process a system of "one party, two coalitions." This has been a post-Deng framework for charting the succession of power in China, ensuring checks and balances, and preventing monopolies. For instance, Deng's successor, princeling Jiang Zemin, was replaced by tuanpai Hu Jintao, who was then replaced by princeling Xi Jinping. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang is also a tuanpai.

No Chinese leader altered Deng's matrix; however, China under Xi Jinping seems to be different, as the 20th Central Committee of the CCP has taken departure from this framework. Now, with Xi as the "core leader," only the "elitist" coalition is in power. Xi's political prefixes have significantly increased his authority in the last ten years. Xi has also strengthened the Party's aristocratic coalition by adding his loyalists. For instance, the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC, 中国共产党中央政治局常务委员会) saw four out of seven of its members replaced with Xi loyalists, such as Li Keqiang and his ally Wang Yang, who were forced into retirement, while Hu Chunhua, another key partner of Li, was not only excluded but forced off the Politburo entirely, and Han Zheng, considered a factional ally of former leader Jiang Zemin, was also ousted. Instead, Xi's devoted loyalists such as Li Qiang (Shanghai Party Secretary), Ding Xuexiang (Chief of Staff), Cai Qi (Beijing Party Secretary), and Li Xi (Guangdong Party Secretary) have been elevated to the Politburo. Li Qiang is likely to succeed Li Keqiang as the new Premier. At the same time, Cai and Li have become Head of the Central Secretariat and Head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), respectively, and Ding is expected to become the Executive Vice Premier.

Furthermore, the two members of the PBSC (other than Xi himself) who retained their seats are Zhao Leji, the former head of the CCDI, and Wang Huning, the chief ideologue of the CCP, both closely associated with Xi. Thereby, Xi has eradicated all existing factions and consolidated power on his own terms by choosing members of his choice. Apart from ending the "one party, two coalitions" practice, Xi's appointment for a third term in office has broken the two-term limit tradition established by Deng Xiaoping. With no successor in line, Xi has secured his rule until 2035.

Xi has risen in politics with his views adopted as China's new ruling ideology and an essential element of China's rise under "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (中国特色社会主义)." Xi has consolidated authority since the 2012 18th Party Congress. Xi first proposed the "Chinese Dream" with the goal of "great rejuvenation" of the Chinese nation. This has been inspired by two centenary goals, namely, to build a moderately prosperous society by the centenary of the CCP in 2021 and to turn China into a modern socialist country by the centenary of the People's Republic of China in 2049. In 2015, Xi introduced his political theory of "Four Comprehensives" to comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepen reform, comprehensively

govern the nation according to law, and comprehensively be strict in governing the Party. The first three comprehensives seem to be taken from prior Chinese presidents' strategic thinking. Still, the fourth comprehensive exemplifies Xi's legacy in promoting the anti-corruption drive against "tigers" (senior officials) and "flies" (lower-ranked cadres), both civil and military. Also, as Chairman of the Central Military Commission and Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army, Xi's personal and administrative power has grown significantly in the last two terms.

Xi's ten-year presidency and, more importantly, his profile as the Party's general secretary has been built on command and control, strengthened by a committed leadership core. Hence, Xi's road to the 20th Party Congress marks a decade of progress in making the CCP a "one-man party."

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