



Towards 19th Party Congress: Xi Jinping consolidates his position

Speaker: Mr. Krishan Varma

Chair: Mr. Ashok K Kantha

Venue: Council for Social Development, Lodi Estate

The speaker presented a canvas of internal matters of China since Xi Jinping took the lead as the President of the people's republic of China in 2012. He primarily delved into the steps that were taken on the way to consolidate his position. He examined the issues that confront him in terms of policy, personality and subsequently the changes that have been brought forth.

The speaker argued, assuming concurrently the post of Party General Secretary, President and Chairman, CMC, he has methodically proceeded to eliminate all vestiges of power of rival factions, most notably that of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. He launched an intense anti-corruption campaign against party and PLA, not sparing even members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau (SCPB) and Central Military Commission (CMC), believed to be opposed to him. 240 senior party officials and 86 senior PLA officers have been dismissed. 2300 PLA personnel and more than one million lower level officials are under investigation. His regime has ruthlessly stifled dissent and muzzled critics. He has strengthened control over social, print & electronic media. Also, while seeming to be liberal and attempting to "deepen" political and economic reform, actually little has been done to reform the SOEs, one of the bastions of his support, and replace their leaders in decision making bodies like the CC of CCP.

He has appealed to the inherent xenophobic inclination in the Chinese people to aggressively assert Chinese sovereignty. He has not demurred in taking matters to the brink with the US and Japan while dealing with territorial and sovereignty issues like the SCS, Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. Additionally, he has launched strategic initiatives like OBOR/BRI to expand the sphere of Chinese influence across Asia, Africa and Europe, clearly aimed to protect and enhance China's self interest in territorial and economic terms, cleverly couched in policy statements expressing Chinese support to globalization and connectivity.

On the ideological front, a very well-orchestrated campaign to project Xi as a leader of the likes of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping is underway. He has astutely managed party's endorsement as the 'core' of the CCP leadership, espoused a 'China dream' to be achieved before the 100th year of the party's founding on July 1, 2021. Further, in a clearly discernible effort to enshrine his contribution to the politico-economic development of China and secure a place in the pantheon of leaders like Mao and Deng, he is evolving a theoretical underpinning of his ambition by introducing the 'Four Comprehensives' and 'Governing Concepts'. These may eventually transcend to 'Xi Jinping Thought' and find a place in the Party Constitution.

In the challenging economic field where a slow-down in the Chinese economy has tested stability, law and order and undercurrent of dissent, he has astutely managed to set up international financial institutions like the AIIB and launched the OBOR/BRI initiative to stimulate the economy. He has maintained stability of the yuan; is trying to lower debts of local governments; cool down the over-heated property market; raise domestic consumption while pushing exports and through the above initiatives seek to absorb excess capacity which is hurting the important manufacturing sector of the Chinese economy.

Significant changes in the composition of the SCPB, PB, CC with Xi managing to induct his protégé and followers in these bodies at the upcoming Congress are expected. Whether he will be able to further consolidate and pave the way for a third term and succeed in having his 'Thought' or 'Concept' enshrined in the Party Constitution is currently unclear. The picture may gain some clarity after the Beidaihe confabulations.

Discussion:

The questions that followed focused on why Li Keqiang the 7th Chinese Premier who has been a leading official is not mentioned. Speaker replied saying that Le Keqiang has been quiet after Xi took over the leadership. Li receded to background as Xi is the driving force in every matter today. Following Xi's consolidation will Xi be more strident internationally or sober in personality. The speaker elucidated saying that Xi's personality is so strong that he will be more recalcitrant and far more assertive. It would be in all aspects - politically, militarily and economically. China has become strident in the region and first to challenge US supremacy with its global ambition. However, Xi has five more years in his tenure, after his withdrawal what would be the possible outcome? The speaker argued that it would be a vague assessment but one possible personality has come up who can continue what Xi has started but apart from him and it is difficult to find someone comparable to Xi as a possible successor to continue what he has done.

About the Speaker:

Mr. Krishan Varma is former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India. During an illustrious career spanning 35 years, he held several key appointments within the country and abroad. He held sensitive assignments in politically and socially fragile militancy affected border regions of J&K and India's northeast. His diplomatic assignments include postings to countries in South Asia, East Asia and the USA. He is the recipient of awards for Distinguished and Meritorious Service from the Prime Minister of India and several Commendation Letters for outstanding performance during his career. His areas of specialization are China, the Far East, Koreas, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific and Indian Ocean region.

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