



19th Congress of the CPC: Outcomes and Implications for India

Panel: Amb. Shyam Saran, Amb. Vijay K Nambiar and Lt Gen. SL Narasimhan

Chair: Amb. Ashok Kantha, Director, ICS

India International Centre, New Delhi

This round table was led by a panel of men, who, from different quarters and at the height of their offices interacted closely with the many elements of the Chinese political apparatus, trying to ascertain the implications of the recently concluded 19th Party Congress event, raised many interesting observations that otherwise tend to be overlooked in the mainstream discourse. At the very onset, the Chair in his introductory remarks, stressed the need to not be diverted by the policy implications that tend to arise from the carefully choreographed plenum but to scrutinize the newly fashioned discourse, which now includes “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”, the affirmation of Xi Jinping’s paramountcy and the end of "collective leadership" which was inculcated by Deng Xiaoping. On the global front, he added, that we may see a China which is more willing to assert the clout that it managed to accumulate in the past three decades. The distinguished panel, hardly in need of any introduction, gladly delved in detail it’s many implications.

Ambassador Shyam Saran laid out many observations which he holds to be imperative to our understanding of the CPC’s intended trajectory. He observed that the Party now seems be less conscious of the separation between itself and the government and also, in the light of which, attempts to level the playing field between the private entities vis-à-vis the state owned enterprises seems to have come to a pause. With the predominant neoliberal global order still nursing itself from the earlier crises, Saran added that China perceived a strategic opportunity afforded by its development model, or as Saran would prefer to call it, "Chinese Socialism with Global Characteristics". For India, this would mean the need to develop more nuanced coping strategies as the possibilities of bumping into each other have risen.

Ambassador Nambiar, observed that as Xi intends and will, most likely, be straddling the party at its centenary celebrations, one needs to stress the need to understand enigmatic durability of the party which despite many disasters and ideological pressures- be it the repercussions of the Lushan conference or the fate inflicted upon Xi Zhongshun (Xi Jinping's father) -has managed to come a long way, to subsequently incorporate the economic model which now its famous for. It has not only managed to uplift many out of poverty but also have bought in immense wealth. Xi seems to have positioned himself by problematising the inequality that it brought along. It is at this juncture that Xi has situated his anti-corruption campaign and through which he wrested further control. Nambiar also added that, subsequent amendments to the Constitution have been in the areas of "discipline" and "inspection" which allows Xi more teeth. He ended with the observation that there now seems a growing awareness with the Chinese that India could not be expected to buy into the so called "china centric" order.

Gen. Narasimhan, laying out the military implications of the CPC drew a line of continuum between the 3rd Plenum of the 18th CPC and the recent one. Comparing a 2015 defence White Paper to Xi's report to the 19th Party Congress, Narsimhan traced what he perceives as, "doctrinal changes". He observed that the implications arising from the incorporation of the word, "new domains" and "maintaining world and regional peace" in addition to the previously stated objectives of 'securing and safeguarding its interests' would be very interesting. The major areas of focus in the new report, as per Narasimhan, includes not just the "modernization" of the PLA with cursory references to Artificial Intelligence, but also on the stress "political integrity" along with the oft repeated- "obeying party's command", signalling a tighter grip over the army. There seems to be a furthering, if not the creation, of an expectation which would see the greater involvement of the armed forces, in the pretext of securing developmental interests. This seems to involve not only greater association between the civilian and military in terms of technology transfer but also the greater induction of personnel from the former. He also noted that with the downsizing of the Central Military Commission from eleven to seven, the party intends to have a stronger hold over the army. Narasimhan concluded with the observation that Gen. Wei Fenghe of the CMC would probably be appointed as the Defence Minister as well.

Later, the speakers took many questions and noted divergent perspectives from the audience. Amidst one of the exchanges, Saran added that he was surprised by Wang Qishan not being accorded any further role and that perhaps it was because Xi intends something

larger with regard to Wang. Similarly, with matters down the line, Narasimhan expected interesting developments in the Walvis Bay with respect to China's global footprint. Whereas, Nambiar added that he was particularly piqued by the role Wan Huning would be playing from now onwards.

The session ended with the Chair acknowledging the India International Centre for co-hosting the event and invited the audience to continue their animated the discussions over tea.

Report prepared by Cidarath Sajith, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.

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