



How to Read Xi Jinping's Third Term: Considerations from Personnel Announcement and Speeches

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Xi Jinping's third term has begun. From Xi's own speeches and the personnel announcements made to date, we can make the following statements.

First, the party chairmanship system was not adopted, and the general secretary system, or a collective leadership system, was maintained, but instead almost all members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee are considered to be Xi's faction, and there are no female Central Politburo members. This feature may have indicated that it is not "unity" to include diverse groups, but rather that it is "unity" to be united under a single Xi Jinping faction.

Second, the reason why "unity" was emphasized both in speeches and in personnel announcements is probably because the CCP now thinks it is uncertain whether China can achieve its goals of becoming a modern, socialist country by 2035 and a "great modern socialist country" by 2049. The economic stall, including COVID-19, and pressure from the U.S. and other advanced countries are the reasons for this uncertainty. Therefore, the CCP seeks to strengthen the unity of the CCP, of the Chinese people, and even of the Chinese nation as a whole. This is a manifestation of a sense of crisis.

Third, no successor has been appointed. Two new Politburo Standing Committee members would have been considered de facto successors, but in fact there are four. The Central Military Commission also has no civilian officials other than Xi Jinping himself. This has increased the likelihood that Xi Jinping would continue as general secretary for the next 10 years.

Fourth, a number of conventions have been broken. The mandatory retirement age of 68 and the practice of having a former vice premier become the premier are likely to be broken. The democratization within the Party since the eras of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao has collapsed, at least in terms of personnel matters. As a result, the generational transition has been delayed, and China's "seventh generation," mostly born in the 1970s, has not joined the Politburo. Xi Jinping may have a distrust of the "sixth generation" and younger who did not experience the Cultural Revolution.

Fifth, there is the problem of personnel in charge of economic and fiscal affairs. Although reformists such as Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, and Hu Chunhua have been purged, and He Lifeng is still in place, the personnel system in charge of the economy, which is a major concern, has been weakened. If the emphasis is only on "common" in "common prosperity for all" (and in this context, "common"

means distribution), the “reform and opening up” policy will be suppressed. This will also affect diplomacy, especially given that reform and opening up are what drives cooperation with Western countries.

Sixth, there is no significant change in expression with regard to Taiwan; the basic line is “win without fighting” by 2049 as the target year. Since China considers the people of Taiwan as part of “the Chinese People” and assumes that they will share the same “dream” together, the official goal is to incorporate Taiwanese society. In other words, China will continue to increase military pressure, infiltrate society through cyberattacks and disinformation, and impose economic sanctions in order to force Taiwanese society toward unification. The problem is what will happen when Xi Jinping comes to regard this policy as being ineffective. At that point, he will likely begin to increase the level of military pressure.

Seventh, the question is how to deal with the dissatisfaction within the Party with these personnel appointments and the dissatisfaction of society with the nearly 20% unemployment rate, the stalling economy, and the COVID-19 countermeasures. The Xi Jinping regime will likely use big data and whole-process democracy to absorb social dissatisfaction in advance, and, at the same time, under the guise of “national security,” it will eliminate dissenters through digital surveillance and control networks at the basic social level. However, a “happy surveillance society” is only possible if the CCP continues to provide affluence and convenience to society. Can this policy continue under the new regime? Is it really possible for Xi Jinping’s dream to match the dreams of the CCP members, the Chinese people, and the Chinese nation?

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