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THE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE SECOND XI ADMINISTRATION

Akio Takahara

- Xi Jinping has gained paramount authority and the collective leadership that characterized the Post-Mao Zedong era has virtually ended.
- Xi Jinping announced the need to meet people's daily increasing desire for democracy, rule of law, equality, justice, etc., but presented few concrete measures.
- On external policy, it is likely that China will continue taking a mixed hardline/softline stance.

The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.

With the National Congress and the first plenary meeting of the new Central Committee finished, the second Xi Jinping administration has now been formed. Personnel changes at state institutions will not officially take effect until next spring, but informal arrangements have been made. It seems likely that Premier Li Keqiang, the second-ranked member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), will retain his position, third-ranked Li Zhanshu will be named Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, fourth-ranked Wang Yang will be made Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, fifth-ranked Wang Huning will be assigned organizational, ideological and other duties within the CCP while serving concurrently as first secretary of the CCP's Central Secretariat, sixth-ranked Zhao Leji will become Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and seventh-ranked Han Zheng will be appointed first deputy prime minister of the State Council.

There had been discussions beginning last year about resurrecting the party chairmanship, but ultimately the secretary-general system, together with the division of responsibilities between the Politburo Standing Committee and the Central Politburo members, was maintained. In form, there do not appear to have been any changes in the collective leadership system.

In substance, however, the collective leadership system has undergone a significant transformation. The first Xi Jinping administration had already established two new cross-sectional party organizations: the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms and the Central National Security Commission. By assuming the top posts in these organizations, Xi Jinping has institutionally secured command authority over areas in which authority had originally been held by other Central Politburo members.

Secondly, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era" has been newly incorporated into the CCP's constitution as guiding principles constituting an orthodox ideology. This is the first time since Deng Xiaoping Theory was adopted that such guiding principles have been entitled with a leader's name, and not since Mao Zedong Thought had they been named after a leader still in power. Xi Jinping has assumed overwhelming


authority within the CCP, and he is being promoted in a way reminiscent of the cult of personality around Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution, as evidenced, for example, by his enormous photograph in the front page of *People's Daily*. Authority and power are steadily being concentrated in the hands of Xi Jinping.

What policies will the new administration pursue? Attention was focused on the change in the “principal contradiction facing society,” declared at the recent Party Congress to be “the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life.” According to Xi Jinping, the needs to be met for people to live a better life include “not only material and cultural needs but also their demands for democracy, the rule of law, fairness and justice, security and a better environment.” While this description does indicate recognition of the problem at hand, no solutions to this principal contradiction such as income redistribution or the realization of political rights were presented. Conspicuous instead were the insistence on strengthening leadership by the CCP, the frequent use of abstract slogans, and an emphasis on nationalism.

On foreign policy, Xi Jinping expressed his intent to continue taking a mixed hardline/softline stance. In his speech, he insisted that China remain on a path of peaceful development and encouraged the building of a human community bound together by a common destiny. At the same time, he vowed that China would never abandon its national interests, urging “full adherence by the Party to the doctrine of a strong military for a new era that requires a strong country and a strong military.”

What impact will Xi Jinping’s growing power have on domestic and foreign policy? Although this power will enable him to pursue bold approaches on difficult issues, there are concerns that such a concentration of power in a single leader could result in errors in judgment and abuses of power. Strengthening the CCP’s leadership in certain respects also goes against the current of modernization, characterized by institutionalization, establishment of the rule of law, and transition to a market economy. A careful eye should be kept on the

degree to which the CCP will demand the establishment of party organizations within companies and their participation in company management.

Stability within the top political tier will make it easier for the administration to adopt a moderate foreign policy without fear of criticism. Nevertheless, Xi Jinping's personality as well as the efforts of those around him to accommodate his wishes could become increasingly apparent in the country's actions vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Should policy failures or bureaucratic inaction cause the economy to further decelerate, the administration could approach Japan in hopes of securing economic benefits. In the event of social instability, though, Xi Jinping might be increasingly tempted to resort to conflict with a "foreign enemy" as a means of rallying the country around the administration. 

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