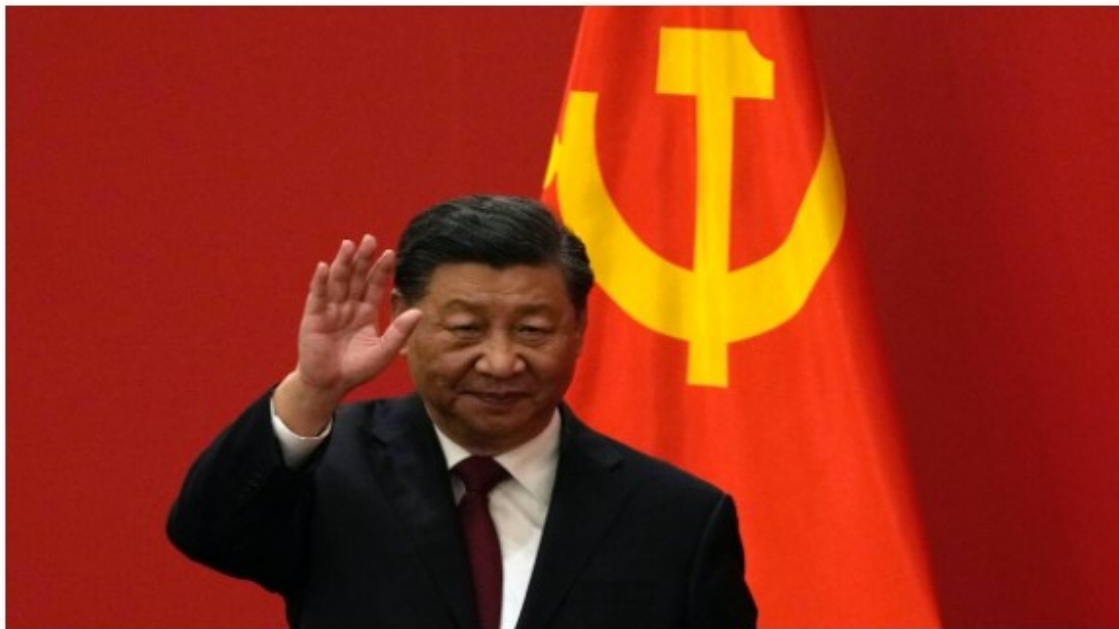


## Red Dynasty-Yellow Emperors: Xi Sets China on Long March to a New Era

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Chinese President Xi Jinping waves at an event to introduce new members of the Politburo Standing Committee at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Sunday, Oct. 23, 2022. (AP)

When Mao Zedong proclaimed establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, it was deemed as 'mandate from heaven' (tianming), a Confucian idea to facilitate succession cycle that selects an individual to rule. King Wen (1050 BCE) of Zhou feudal state was the first ruler to claim the heavenly mandate. Mao and Deng Xiaoping, People's Liberation Army (PLA) veterans, enjoyed life-long decree to rule the 'Middle Kingdom'; the modern

Emperors of Red Dynasty- Communist Party of China (CPC). Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, third and fourth generation Communist leaders abided by the ‘collective leadership’ model, enunciated by Deng, adhering to the ‘two terms’ tenure. Hu handed over the reins to Xi Jinping in 2012. A dark horse, Xi was chosen as a consensus candidate over Li Keqiang, the current PM, who incidentally stands dropped in the recently concluded Party Congress. Given his mild demeanour, Xi was assumed to follow the constitutional rule but chose to play his hand differently.

Xi systematically consolidated his hold on twin levers of power- CPC and PLA. His anti-corruption campaign proved handy to purge the known political rivals. He also reasserted the role of state sector in the economy. Deep rooted military reforms initiated by Xi sought to make PLA a modern fighting force at par with Western Militaries. He reaffirmed CPC authority over the military, restructured ‘Central Military Commission’ (CMC) to directly control the PLA.

At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, Xi further strengthened his iron grip over the party and a year later, discarded the two term limit to Presidency to be life-long incumbent. “Xi Jinping Thoughts for New Era Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” were enshrined in Communist Party constitution-an honour that had been reserved only for Mao so far. Xi unveiled ‘China Dream’ (Zhong Meng); a ‘powerful and prosperous’ China, entering a ‘New Era’, emerging as a ‘great modern socialist country’ by mid of the century. ‘Belt-Road Initiative’ (BRI) launched by Xi entails mega connectivity projects across the globe, aimed to expand China’s strategic outreach. During the Covid 19 pandemic, Xi upped the ante in the disputed areas of South and East China Seas, [Taiwan](#) Strait and Eastern Ladakh region of India to project himself as a leader of international stature. Internally too, Xi tightened the noose around Hong Kong and Xinjiang, unleashing ruthless crackdown.

It is evident that Xi had painstakingly set the stage for the renewed mandate to all powerful post of Secretary General of the CPC for the third time. Thus Twentieth Party Congress was merely a choreographed event. During the two hours speech in the opening session, Xi set out the Vision 2035. He confidently defended his ‘hard-line reign’ and underscored China’s rising influence during his tenure. Xi vowed to steer China towards national rejuvenation and claimed victory over numerous challenges, namely, Covid 19 by protecting lives of the citizens, steering Hong Kong from chaos to governance, and standing up to ‘independence forces in Taiwan’. China has

taken a clear cut stand against hegemonism, unilateralism and bullying, stated Xi; an oblique reference to US led world order.

Xi now virtually owns the system as the new seven member 'Politburo Standing Committee' (PBSC), the apex body is composed of his loyalists. Even the Politburo, second tier of Party power with two dozen members does not have representation from the opposing faction. It includes two military commanders, General Zhang Youxia and General Weidong who also will be Vice Chairmen in the CMC, headed by Chairman Xi, the second most powerful post. Incidentally, there is no successor to constitute 'Sixth Generation' leadership as Xi intends to be at the helm for possibly two more terms.

PRC's future agenda will be driven by both internal and external dynamics, former overriding the latter. China's slowing economy will be Xi's top priority. To achieve quality of growth, he has advocated the policy of 'common prosperity' which seeks to bolster social equality besides 'dual circulation' system- entails boosting domestic consumption and reducing dependence on export markets. Xi prioritising ideology over reforms is bound to adversely impact the economic growth.

As per Xi, national security is the foundation of PRC's rejuvenation and social stability. During his speech, Xi called PLA to prepare for 'new situations for modernization of national defence'. He has exhorted the military to be prepared to fight and win limited wars. As sovereignty over the claimed territories remains a core issue, Xi during his speech stated "China would strive for peaceful reunification of Taiwan", yet not renounce the use of force. The world is set to witness a more aggressive China.

With respect to India, little is expected to change. In China's rejuvenation phenomenon, any competitor is perceived as an impediment. Hence marginalized India suits Xi's grand design. China's forays into India's neighbourhood are expected to be more pronounced. Chinese military is likely to continue with its provocative activities across the LAC in the form of 'Grey Zone Warfare'. Xi appears to be highly pleased with the performance of PLA in Ladakh, evident from the way the senior commanders of 'Western Theatre Command' have been rewarded with positions in the Politburo and Central Committee. Therefore, India has no option but to reimagine its China policy, modernize the armed forces, review higher defence organizations and revamp border management structures on highest priority.

Xi's China model based on political 'neo authoritarianism' and 'state driven' development is an alternate to 'Western Liberal Democratic Capitalist' one. He has chosen to ride the Dragon solo and replicate Mao, though he does not belong to the same tribe, being a Princeling (son of Zhongxun-former Vice Premier), fully cognizant of disastrous consequences if policies go awry. In case Xi succeeds in leading China into the 'New Era', then as per the Chinese Eleventh Century Classic "The General Mirror for Aid of Government" (Cu Chi Tang Qian), he would qualify to be called an Emperor.

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