

**XI JINPING'S REFORM LEADING GROUP:
A YEAR IN OPERATION**

Lance L. P. GORE

EAI Background Brief No. 1028

Date of Publication: 28 May 2015

Executive Summary

1. The Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (CLGCDR) was established on 30 December 2013 to guide the second round of reforms since Deng Xiaoping. The objective is to lay the institutional foundation for the next stage of China's development.
2. Headed by President Xi Jinping, the CLGCDR represents the largest re-centralisation of power in recent history. It has altered the power distribution at the top and changed the way the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) operates. It accentuates Xi as the top guy and the rest of the PSC members as his assistants.
3. Unlike the previous round of reforms that concentrated on the economy, this round covers the economic, political, social and ecological systems, cultural institutions and Party-building. These reforms are significantly more complex and more fundamental than the previous ones. The challenges are therefore daunting.
4. In 2014 the CLGCDR authorised 80 major reforms; another 108 reforms were carried out by the central bureaucracies in their respective areas. Altogether 370 reform measures had been rolled out, which marked one of the most intensive periods in reform history.
5. By 5 May 2015 the CLGCDR had convened 12 meetings and passed 50 reform bills. The greatest attention was given to political reforms, especially institutional reforms intended to establish the rule of law, with 17 programmes devoted to this area.
6. The operation of the CLGCDR is influenced by the personal style of Xi, who has been widely regarded as the most powerful leader since Deng. Unlike Deng, Xi is meticulous, systematic, comprehensive and pragmatic. He is a hands-on manager and his reforms are problem-driven.

7. The work of the CLGCDR involves planning at the beginning, progress review in the middle and summary at the end of the year before starting another cycle. At the fourth meeting a seven-year (2014 - 2020) comprehensive reform plan of 336 major reforms was drawn.
8. Nevertheless, the meetings exhibit randomness in their agenda. Reform plans are mostly drawn by the usual line bureaucracies and policy specialists; the role of the CLGCDR is to screen, balance and endow them with the highest authority to overcome possible resistance down the line.
9. Xi faces strong resistance. Unlike reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, the cadre corps are mostly on the losing side in this round of reforms. The anti-corruption campaign has a chilling effect upon the cadre corps that Xi has to rely on for implementing the reforms.
10. While Xi is riding high in popularity both at home and abroad, he has yet to find a way to translate this popularity into concrete support for the reforms. Currently the reforms suffer from passivity and resistance from middle bureaucrats. He has yet to assemble a team of capable reformers to share his burden.