

XI JINPING'S LEADERSHIP STYLE

SHAN Wei

EAI background Brief No. 1120

Date of Publication: 17 March 2016

Executive Summary

1. After three years in power, Chinese President Xi Jinping has demonstrated a leadership style that is different from his predecessors.
2. His leadership style can be roughly summarised as the Maoist style and the populist style. The Maoist elements may reflect his personal experience and beliefs, and the populist elements show his efforts to consolidate power. Both approaches are mutually supportive and cannot be clearly divided.
3. Xi emulated Mao by calling for a same titled “Forum on Literature and Art” that requires writers and artists to serve socialist ends and become spokespeople of the party and a Gutian military conference to reinforce the principle of “party-commands-army”.
4. He has established his personal dominance within the party-state by setting up a number of small leading groups, which have reduced the decision-making authority of the Politburo and the State Council. Only a very small circle of people he trusts is involved in the top decision-making process.
5. Xi is tougher and more merciless than his predecessors in managing political rivalry and dissenting activities. In foreign relations he has maintained a tough stance towards territorial disputes and American domination in the Asia-Pacific region.
6. By enforcing his strong suspicion of “Western values” in propaganda campaigns and cultural policy, the authorities under Xi have imposed greater ideological supervision in universities and tightened control over internet public opinions.
7. Xi has been successful in portraying himself as a populist leader. The whole party-state propaganda machine has been geared towards promoting his personality.

8. The concentration of power and a distinct personal leadership may help Xi to push long delayed reforms in economic structures, but also make decision-making more vulnerable to mistakes and power abuse.
9. With this distinct leadership style Xi has achieved significant progress in legal and military reforms, as well as anti-corruption. Yet his ambitious economic reform has not progressed as expected. How Xi will adjust his leadership style and deliver reforms he promised remains to be seen.