

**CHINA'S POLITICS IN 2014:
XI JINPING AS A GAME CHANGER**

ZHENG Yongnian & CHEN Gang

EAI Background Brief No. 983

Executive Summary

1. A game changer in China's elite politics, President Xi Jinping gave the directive to investigate Zhou Yongkang, Xu Caihou, Ling Jihua and Su Rong, which signalled that Xi was confident enough to take down senior associates of his predecessors.
2. Xi has consolidated the once-fragmented power to himself by heading several newly established leading small groups. The extensive anti-corruption campaign has captured some 50 senior officials and thousands of lowly bureaucrats in two years of his office.
3. Xi is also a steadfast reformer, rolling out a large number of socioeconomic and political reform tasks at the Third and Fourth Party Plenums. These reforms have long been obstructed by vested interests.
4. Xi has been using the official theme of the Fourth Plenum, "governing the country according to law", to consolidate his power against lingering political influence of retired party elders in informal politics.
5. Thanks to bold reforms and anti-corruption campaigns, Xi currently enjoys high levels of popularity in the Party and with the public.
6. Xi has tapped on rising nationalism to promote "China dream" as his own doctrine. Ideologically conservative, Xi is very likely to further tighten control over ideology and media.
7. Xi's full power consolidation heavily relies on his control of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which has its own autonomous administrative and operation process that creates fault lines in civilian oversight of senior generals.
8. Throughout the year, when large-scale anti-graft purges were carried out in the PLA, Xi had repeatedly emphasised the importance of the PLA's absolute loyalty and firm faith in the Party leadership.

9. Corruption investigations have generated a kind of “witch-hunt” fear in the bureaucracy, leading to inaction of government officials and a political paralysis that has, in turn, stalled project implementation and cut-back on domestic investment.
10. As a large number of senior officials and generals have been removed from their posts for corruption charges, the top leader could take this opportunity to put his own people in those crucial positions to realise his promises.