CHINA’S NEW GUIDING IDEOLOGY: THE UNFOLDING OF THE XI JINPING ERA

Lance L. P. Gore

EAI Background Brief No. 1296

Date of Publication: 9 November 2017
Executive Summary

1. The much-awaited 19th Party Congress saw the unveiling of a new official guiding ideology in General Secretary Xi Jinping’s political report at the opening session on 18 October 2017.

2. Officially dubbed as “Xi Jinping Thought of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” (Xi Thought henceforth), it has subsequently been enshrined in the revised Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Constitution, marking the official inauguration of the Xi Jinping era.

3. Xi Thought provides the blueprint for reforms to build a new system that can sustain Chinese development to the next stage, root out corruption and end once and for all the infighting between the left and the right radicals.

4. The grand objective of Xi Thought is to build China into “a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful” by the middle of the 21st century.

5. The “principal contradiction” in the Xi era is that between “unbalanced and inadequate development and people's ever-growing need for a better life”, whereas previously the official characterisation of the “principal contradiction” used to be that between “the increasing material and cultural needs of the people and the backward social productivity”.

6. Simply put, besides material betterment, the CCP will have to address people’s increasing demands “for democracy, rule of law, fairness and justice, security and a better environment”, a departure from the old gross domestic product-driven model.

7. The CCP will seek simultaneous progress in five areas: economic, political, cultural, social and ecological based on a strategy of “four comprehensives”: comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepen
reforms, comprehensively implement the rule of law and comprehensively strengthen Party discipline.

8. The report to the Congress outlines policy guide in 14 areas, including CCP leadership, rule law, socialist core values, national security, military reform and foreign affairs. Little is new, but together, it forms a comprehensive plan.

9. The Party and the nation are expected to unite behind this vision and work hard in the next five years and beyond for the same goals. With this ideological consensus, Xi is in a position to demand loyalty from party members, enforce strict party discipline and fight the centrifugal forces within the Party.

10. The rise of Xi and the lack of credible check on his power can be worrisome. Domestically Xi faces many challenges, including motivating the cadre corps demoralised by his anti-corruption campaign and reforms stripping their privileges. Internationally, a more active and assertive foreign policy is expected.