



XI JINPING'S CENTENARY SPEECH EXUDES CONFIDENCE AND DETERMINATION

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Centenaries are celebrated around the world. These are occasions for special celebration when it is the centenary of the ruling political party, as well as an opportunity for it to share its assessment of the journey thus far and give a broad sense of direction for the future. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC) General Secretary Xi Jinping did just that in his speech. He also mentioned the Belt and Road Initiative and the 'community of shared destiny', both his personal projects, possibly hinting that he will continue in office beyond the Party Congress scheduled for late next year. The CCP's centenary celebrations held in Beijing on July 1, and especially its General Secretary Xi Jinping's speech, will be closely scrutinised for the clues they yield of the path that the CCP's incumbent leadership hopes to tread over the next hundred years.

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An indication that the CCP leadership is adequately sensitive to the military's morale to make an on-course correction was the visible departure from the CCP's announcement in late March that there would be no military parade to mark the Party's centenary. Instead, there was a military parade and a flypast led by the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF)'s latest generation J-20 'stealth' fighter aircraft and latest ZL-10 transport helicopters flying in the formation '100' at Tiananmen Square. A carefully vetted crowd of 70,000 watched the ceremony.

Earlier on June 28, there was a grand musical extravaganza. It was witnessed by the entire Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). Among the other invitees were: Ding Xuexiang, Wang Chen, Liu He, Xu Qiliang, Sun Chunlan, Yang Jiechi, Yang Xiaodu, Zhang Youxia,

Chen Xi, Hu Chunhua, Guo Shengkun, Huang Kunming, Cai Qi, Li Ruihuan, Jia Qinglin, Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Zeng Qinghong, Wu Guanzheng, Li Changchun, He Guoqiang, Liu Yunshan, Zhang Gaoli, You Quan, Cao Jianming, Zhang Chunxian, Shen Yueyue, Ji Bingxuan, Chen Zhu, Wang Dongming, Bai Ma Chilin, Ding Zhongli, Hao Mingjin, Cai Dafeng, Wu Weihua, Wei Fenghe, Wang Yong, Wang Yi, Xiao Jie, Zhao Kezhi, Zhou Qiang, Zhang Jun, Zhang Qingli, Liu Qibao, Pabala Grelange, Wan Gang, He Houhua, Lu Zhangong, Ma Biao, Chen Xiaoguang, Liang Zhenying, Xia Baolong, Li Bin, Battelle, Wang Yongqing, He Lifeng, Su Hui, Zheng Jianbang, Gu Shengzu, Liu Xincheng, He Wei, Shao Hong, Gao Yunlong and Wang Lequan, Wang Zhaoguo, Hui Liangyu, Liu Qi, Wu Yi, Cao Gangchuan, Liu Yandong, Li Yuanchao, Ma Kai, Li Jianguo, Fan Changlong, Meng Jianzhu, Guo Jinlong, He Yong, Du Qinglin, Zhao Hongzhu, Gu Xiulian, Raidi, Wuyunqimuge, Chen Zhili, Zhou Tienong, Wang Shengjun, Chen Changzhi, Zhang Ping, Xiangba Puncuo, Chang Wanquan, Jia Chunwang, Wang Zhongyu, Zhang Huaixi, Li Meng, Bai Lichen, Chen Kuiyuan, Abulaiti Abdure Xiti, Li Zhaozhuo, Huang Mengfu, Zhang Meiyong, Zhang Rongming, Qian Yunlu, Sun Jiazheng, Li Jinhua, Zheng Wantong, Wang Zhizhen, Han Qide, Luo Fuhe, Li Haifeng, Chen Yuan, Zhou Xiaochuan, Wang Jiarui, Qi Xuchun, Liu Xiaofeng, Wang Qinmin, and Li Zuocheng, Miao Hua, Zhang Shengmin, Chen Bingde, Li Jinai, Qiao Qingchen, Jing Zhiyuan, Zhao Keshi, Wu Shengli, Ma Xiaotian, Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Carrie Lam, Chief Executive of Macau Special Administrative Region He Yicheng.

The celebrations culminated with the ceremony at Tiananmen Gate on July 1, where honour guards, military musicians, youthful choristers and thousands of flag-waving guests provided pomp and circumstance for the occasion. The proceedings stretched for nearly two hours and began and ended with the chorus singing patriotic songs like “Without the Communist Party, There Would be No New China”! The Party was honoured with a 100-gun salute and 56 artillery guns fired 56 salvos acknowledging China’s 56 officially recognized ethnic minority nationalities. Among the 29 individuals awarded the ‘July 1st Medal’, however, there was only one Tibetan and one Uyghur.

On the rostrum were the entire Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) and Xi Jinping’s predecessor Hu Jintao. Xi Jinping was observed on state-owned CCTV deferentially walking a step behind the grey haired Hu Jintao and, as he walked to the lectern to deliver his speech, “politely” gesturing Hu Jintao to his seat. Many former Politburo Standing Committee members attended the ceremony on the Tiananmen Gate Tower, including 104-year-old Song Ping, as well as Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin, Yu Zhengsheng, Wu Bangguo, Li Ruihuan, Zhang Dejiang, Zeng Qinghong, Li Changchun, Liu Yunshan, Li Lanqing, Wu Guanzheng, He Guoqiang and Zhang Gaoli. Interesting was the presence of Bo Xicheng, brother of Bo Xilai, reported by China’s social media, as one of the guests invited to attend the July 1st ceremony on the Tiananmen Gate Tower. Hongkong Chief Executive Carrie Lam was also present.

However, 95-year Jiang Zemin, 93-year ex-Premier Zhu Rongji and former Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member and Vice Premier Luo Gan who is 88 years of age,

were absent, possibly because of their age and reported ill health.

The CCP's International Liaison Department had requested political parties from around the world to send congratulatory letters to the CPP on the occasion. Such requests were made to Indian political parties too, but only the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) responded positively.

Xi Jinping's nearly hour long speech was crafted to exude confidence blended with aggression and nationalism. It was calculated as much to concretise the CCP's monopoly on power in China as to rally nationalist sentiment against anti-China foreign forces and mobilise the people for achieving the second centenary goal under the CCP's leadership.

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Xi Jinping subtly directed credit towards himself when he declared "we have brought about a historic resolution to the problem of absolute poverty in China, and we are now marching in confident strides toward the second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects." This was subliminally reinforced early in his speech with the assertion that "Following the Party's 18th National Congress, socialism with Chinese characteristics entered a new era". He elaborated: "In this new era, we have upheld and strengthened the Party's overall leadership, ensured coordinated implementation of the five-sphere integrated plan and the four-pronged comprehensive strategy, upheld and improved the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, modernized China's system and capacity for governance, remained committed to exercising rule-based governance over the Party, and developed a sound system of intraparty regulations. We have overcome a long list of major risks and challenges, fulfilled the first centenary goal, and set out strategic steps for achieving the second centenary goal." In other words, these achievements followed Xi Jinping coming to power. There was no mention of any other Party Congress.

Xi Jinping paid the ritual obeisance and genuflected before the veteran Chinese communist revolutionaries. He acknowledged "Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, and other veteran revolutionaries who contributed greatly to China's revolution, construction, and reform, and to the founding, consolidation, and development of the Communist Party of China". The mention of Chen Yun is interesting. Xi Jinping also said "We owe all that we have achieved over the past hundred years to the concerted efforts of the Chinese Communists, the Chinese people, and the Chinese nation. Chinese Communists, with comrades Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao as their chief representatives, have made tremendous and historic contributions to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. To them, we express our highest respect". As if to especially emphasise the contribution of the Party and its members, on a few occasions

in his speech Xi Jinping placed “Chinese communists” ahead of the “Chinese people”.

Intended primarily for the domestic audience, Xi Jinping’s speech did nevertheless convey some clear messages for other countries. The tough remarks about not allowing China to be humiliated by foreign powers bore Xi Jinping’s imprimatur. Xi Jinping announced that the “new democratic revolution put an end to China’s history as a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society, to the state of total disunity that existed in Old China and to all the unequal treaties imposed on our country by foreign powers and all the privileges that imperialist powers enjoyed in China”. He declared “the time in which the Chinese nation could be bullied and abused by others was gone forever”. These remarks echoed those he made in Mexico in February 2009 as Vice President, when he said: “There are some well-fed foreigners who have nothing better to do than point fingers at our affairs. China does not, first, export revolution; second, export poverty and hunger; third, cause troubles for you”! The remarks will arouse nationalist sentiment among the Chinese people, something the Party feels is necessary as it is convinced that the US and West have stepped-up efforts to instigate a ‘colour revolution’ and bring about the downfall of the CCP.

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He made pointed mention of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), an essential part of China’s second centenary goal and personally backed by him, indicating that China will continue to push it. Similarly, he referred to the concept of ‘community of shared destiny for mankind’ which is also being advocated by him.

The dominant strain that ran through Xi Jinping’s 5515-word (Xinhua’s English version) speech was that of the Party’s indispensability to the people and country. The Party was mentioned 133 times. It was credited with having raised China to its present level: “only socialism could save China, and that only socialism could develop China”. This was highlighted while praising the “Chinese communists, Chinese people and the Chinese nation” for their hard work. Equally emphatic was the assertion that China cannot do without the Party’s leadership. For good measure and to convey an unmistakable message to those wanting to weaken the Party -- by separating the Army from the Party or trying to deprive the Party of its monopoly on power -- Xi Jinping declared we “must uphold the firm leadership of the Party. China’s success hinges on the Party. Without the Chinese Communist Party there will be no new China and no national rejuvenation”.

Xi Jinping stressed the importance of the peoples’ support to the Party and said the Party has to “earn and keep the people’s support”. In this context he assured that “the Party has no special interests of its own – it has never represented any individual interest group, power group, or privileged stratum”. In a thinly veiled reference to the anti-China efforts of the US that the CCP leadership is convinced of, Xi Jinping insisted that the

Party cannot be dislodged. He said: “Any attempt to divide the Party from the Chinese people or set the people against the Party is bound to fail. The more than 95 million Party members and more than 1.4 billion Chinese people will never allow such a scenario to come to pass”. In the weeks leading up to the celebrations the Chinese authorities had warned the people that foreign powers were trying to instigate a “colour revolution”.

The CCP's hundredth founding anniversary was a major event in its history. The Party has effectively used it to project its contribution to China's 'rise' and future relevance to China and its people.

Alluding to the increasing pressure on China from the US, Xi Jinping declared that China will not be intimidated by threats of force. He said “The Chinese people will not allow any external forces to bully, oppress, or enslave us; anyone who deludes themselves into doing so will suffer a crushing and bloody head-on collision with the great wall of steel (PLA) made of the flesh and blood of 1.4 billion Chinese people”. China’s official news agency Xinhua subsequently released a toned-down version of this phrase as official Chinese interlocutors explained that the language was part of the imagery of Chinese vocabulary. The revised version quoted Xi Jinping as saying “Anyone who would attempt to do so will find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion people”.

There were references to Hongkong, Macau and Taiwan. Xi Jinping promised Hongkong and Macau the rule of law, but tempered with the promise of greater autonomy. On Taiwan he specifically mentioned the 1992 consensus and reiterated China and the Party’s commitment to the “full reunification” of China. He did not omit to mention the word “peaceful”. Suggesting that Beijing will continue its psywar against Taiwan, the CCP-owned Global Times on July 2, cited a Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF) poll which shows that among adult Taiwan residents, favourable views of the CPC have increased by 4 percent and negative views decreased by 16 percent as compared to October 2020.

Xi Jinping’s assurance that China will achieve “full reunification”, however, is of import for China’s neighbours. It is particularly relevant for those with whom it has unresolved, outstanding territorial disputes whether on land or at sea.

But throughout this year-long period there was no mention of the CCP’s major policy disasters. These include the Great Leap Forward, and Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which together resulted in the deaths of over 60 million people and left millions more disabled or scarred for life. Similarly, Xi Jinping did not at all mention the difficulties that China will confront in the next few years. Issues like the rapidly greying Chinese population and reducing labour force which will impose increasing strain on the national treasury; the slowing economy which is unlikely to pick up if anti-China sentiment in the US and Europe remains high; the closure of over sixty percent of small and medium businesses; concerns about inflation; and likely drop in living standards leading to popular discontent, were ignored. So too was the rising pressure from the US

and West and the growing threat of conflict. These have the potential to derail China's "march" to its second centenary goal.

The CCP's hundredth founding anniversary was a major event in its history. The Party has effectively used it to project its contribution to China's 'rise' and future relevance to China and its people. But the repeated references in Xi Jinping's speech to foreign bullying, efforts to separate the Party from the people and his emphasis that the Party needs the people's support, do indicate the fears of the CCP leadership. Xi Jinping has nonetheless deftly highlighted his contributions and demonstrated his unchallenged position. Notable was the manner in which Xi Jinping implied that it were his policies and programme that had seen China achieve its first centenary goal and would guide China in "its March to the second century goals".

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