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Issue Brief

CCP at 100: Xi Jinping's Future Foreign Policy Manifesto

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Summary

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 100th-anniversary celebrations featured an hour-long address by Chinese President and Party General Secretary Xi Jinping on the CCP's accolades, while subtly mapping China's future. This issue brief analyses Xi's speech to explain China's grand strategy and foreign policy ambitions post “successful” completion of the country's first centennial goal. The brief argues that Xi's rousing words have reaffirmed China's intentions to make every effort in actualising its domestic goals and global ambitions—without holding much regard for the rules-based order. As a result, China under Xi and the CCP is set to emerge as even more of a threat in the post-first centennial phase. The brief hence argues that the US, its allies, and like-minded states like India must take heed of the warnings present in Xi's speech and prepare to act accordingly to protect their national interests and the global power order.

On 1 July 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) celebrated the 100th anniversary of its foundation. The CCP, which was established by 13 young persons united under a communist agenda in the summer of 1921, now comprises nearly 92 million members (12.55 million of which are below the age of 30).¹ In Chinese estimation, it has grown to be one of the world's largest political parties and has built China into a leading great power,² competing for global supremacy against the US.

Addressing a gathering of over seventy thousand in a behemoth spectacle of pomp and grandeur, Chinese President and CCP General Secretary, Xi Jinping, ushered in the highly anticipated commemoration event with words rife with strategic posturing regarding China's future. Xi delivered the speech at Tiananmen Square, subtly reclaiming power over the historic location whose namesake protests of 1989 marked the biggest civilian unrest CCP has dealt with in modern-day China.³

Xi's speech, nationalistic and non-conforming in nature, was in line with the "strongman" image he has built for himself within and beyond China. Since coming into power, Xi has not only moved to quickly consolidate his political clout and influence within the CCP but also sought to present a much more assertive and nationalistic foreign policy with a clear hardline stance on many contested issues internationally. Over the past year, however, and particularly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, China's foreign policy tactics have become increasingly belligerent—conflict at the India–China border, forays into the East and South China Seas, 'wolf warrior' diplomacy, economic coercion *vis-à-vis* partners like Australia, crackdown in Hong Kong, and "grey zone" activities against Taiwan are examples of this.⁴

Essentially, Beijing has, over the course of the pandemic and leading up to the CCP centenary celebrations, become more blatant in challenging the status-quo world order, aiming to "build a new type of international relations" and indicating that the onset of a new era will, most likely, be shaped by Chinese actions. In this context, Xi's recent speech provides vital insight into China's strategic thinking. What are the future foreign policy ambitions and directives of Xi's (and the CCP's) China, and what are the tactics that Beijing will resort to in achieving these ambitions?

¹ **"Communist Party of China Has Nearly 92 Million Members"**, *Xinhua*, 30 June 2021; and Helen Davidson, **"Chinese Communist Party 100th Anniversary: Xi Jinping Vows China Will Never Be Bullied – As it happened"**, *The Guardian*, 1 July 2021.

² **"People: The Ultimate Success Formula of Century-old CPC"**, *Xinhua*, 30 June 2021.

³ **"Full Text of Xi Jinping's Speech on the CCP's 100th Anniversary"**, *Xinhua*, 1 July 2021.

⁴ Yimou Lee, David Lague and Ben Blanchard, **"China Launches 'Gray-Zone' Warfare to Subdue Taiwan"**, *Reuters*, 10 December 2020.

Drawing Foreign Policy Imperatives from Domestic Dynamics

Much of China's strategic thinking in terms of its international outlook can be understood through the lens of the country's domestic politics.⁵ Although Xi's hardline foreign policy has been repeatedly framed by China as a defence against Western oppression or provocation—as was the case in his CCP anniversary commemoration speech—Xi's domestic priorities and management of internal politics offer a window into how foreign policy decision-making is impacted.⁶

Here, first and foremost, Xi's speech came as a celebration of not only the CCP's century of rule and several successes but also as a promise of what the CCP can grow to be so long as the Chinese people's commitment to the Party does not wane. By laying out the CCP's achievements, Xi's fiery speech unequivocally asserted that the Party remains the only political force that is capable of nurturing and governing China, without which there would be “no new China and no national rejuvenation”, solidifying the CCP's already iron grip on the country. Subsequently, at the onset of his address, Xi declared the successful completion of the first centenary goal—building “a moderately prosperous society in all respects” by CCP's centennial in 2021.⁷ This important milestone was meant to showcase China's march towards the CCP's ambition of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”; here, Xi's declaration in February 2021 that China was free of absolute poverty was an important precursor that highlighted the CCP's preparation for the centennial.⁸ Highlighting the importance for the CCP to deliver on domestic economic goals has long underpinned both Xi and the CCP's authority and legitimacy. In his speech, Xi also emphasised the “century of humiliation”—a factor that continues to greatly govern China's quest for great power identity⁹—therein enabling the CCP to be painted as the nation's saviour, alleviating the status of both the people and the country on global stages.

Xi's message of strength and unity also effectively veiled any inner divisions that may have arisen in the century since the creation of the party. Xi himself has administered

⁵ Christopher W. Bishop, **“To Understanding China's Aggressive Foreign Policy, Look at it's Domestic Politics”**, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 8 October 2020.

⁶ **“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on June 17, 2020”**, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 17 June 2020.

⁷ **“CPC Q&A: What are China's two centennial goals and why do they matter?”**, *New China*, 17 October 2017.

⁸ **“Xi declares complete victory in eradicating absolute poverty in China”**, *Xinhua*, 26 February 2021.

⁹ Gilbert Rozman, **“China's Quest for Great Power Identity”**, *Orbis*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1999, pp. 383–402.

a careful cleanse of Communist party authorities in an anti-corruption campaign, meticulously crafted to remove his political rivals.¹⁰ Ideological dominance remains a major national power-focusing tool of the CCP; Xi's own socialist credentials have governed his ability to oversee strictly the party's image creation within the country. Lauding the CCP as a unique party that has "suffered such tragic sacrifices" has allowed Chinese leaders, and especially Xi, to stress on studying Party history as part of the national education curriculum to uphold "socialism with Chinese characteristics".¹¹ Such moves denote just how central the CCP is to China's internal politics, and how Xi with his firm grip over the CCP is a central force in dictating China's external strategy. Ultimately, Xi's speech has validated his political position in the country and within the CCP.

Concurrently, Xi's tribute to "comrades" Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao—who shaped China's transformation from a "highly centralized planned economy" to a "socialist market economy brimming with vitality" and from isolation to globalisation—was an ode to the Chinese characteristics of communism and socialism that CCP has over time implemented to suit the nation's needs. Importantly, this commendation showed that gradual, need-based changes to the socialist system under these leaders ultimately led to a successful completion of the first centennial goal. Such emphasis on the CCP's historic record was meant to highlight and enable Xi's "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" on not just a national, but a regional and global scale, with more vigour.¹²

Moving forward, the CCP is now preparing itself to achieve its second centennial goal, which is to "build a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious" by 2049, the centenary of the People's Republic of China (PRC) itself.¹³ It is likely to attain its goals through promoting "high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) through joint efforts, aiming to utilise the BRI to yield significant economic as well as political leverages. The BRI has considerable potential to be used as an instrument to expand China's strategic, political and economic footprints in the region through connectivity infrastructure, coupled with

¹⁰ Alexandra Fiol-Mahon, "**Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign: The Hidden Motives of a Modern-Day Mao**", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 17 August 2018.

¹¹ "**Xi Stresses Upholding, Developing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics**", *Xinhua*, 1 July 2021.

¹² "**Backgrounder: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era**", *Xinhua*, 17 March 2018; and Chris Buckley, "**Xi Jinping Thought Explained: A New Ideology for a New Era**", *The New York Times*, 26 February 2018.

¹³ "**CPC Q&A: What are China's Two Centennial Goals and Why Do They Matter?**", *Xinhua*, 17 October 2017.

the expansion of China's export markets¹⁴, promotion of the Renminbi (RMB) as an international currency¹⁵, and reduction of trade frictions to help with tariffs and transport costs.¹⁶ The BRI would also focus on venturing deeper into the health-related domain through its "Health Silk Road",¹⁷ particularly after the COVID-19 outbreak, and build up the country's strength in science and technology through developing the "Digital Silk Road"¹⁸ while focusing on "technological self-reliance" to counter global challenges and assert global leadership.¹⁹

Xi's China in the Emerging International Order

In terms of the CCP's foreign strategy, Xi's speech reflected a strong posture rife with nationalistic fervour. Xi stressed that the Party has shown over time that China is "capable of not only dismantling the old world, but also building a new one". This statement has clearly highlighted Xi's vision of China's future in the global order as a power intending to knock down and reshape a new world. China's revisionist antics have marked a clear threat to the United States' (US) role as the international status-quo power, with Xi making it exceedingly clear that China does not plan to exist in a US-dominated world order. Although Xi stated that China has no "hegemonic traits" while placing peace and harmony as values to be promoted under his aim to promote a "human community with a shared future"²⁰, this was accompanied by threats of a "collision" against any interfering external forces.²¹

China's designs to institute itself as a global leader are not entirely surprising; Beijing's response to the pandemic, particularly in its early stages and with the vaccine

¹⁴ Mei Ling Wang, Qian Qiu and Chang Hwan Choi, "How will the Belt and Road Initiative advance China's Exports?", *Asia Pacific Business Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2019, pp. 1–19.

¹⁵ James Kynge, "**One Belt, One Road set to Turbocharge Renminbi Usage**", *Financial Times*, 30 November 2015.

¹⁶ Michele Ruta, Alen Mulabdic, Siobhan Murray, Nadia Rocha and Francois De Soyres, "**How Much Will the Belt and Road Initiative Reduce Trade Costs?**", *The World Bank*, October 16, 2018.

¹⁷ Kristine Lee and Martijn Rasser, "**China's Health Silk Road is a Dead-End Street**", *Foreign Policy*, 16 June 2020.

¹⁸ Richard Ghiasy and Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy, "**China's Digital Silk Road and the Global Digital Order**", *The Diplomat*, 13 April 2021.

¹⁹ Orange Wang, William Zheng, Jun Mai and Echo Xie, "**Five-Year Plan: China Moves to Technology Self-Sufficiency**", *South China Morning Post*, 30 October 2020.

²⁰ The "community of shared future of mankind" is a core concept of China's foreign policy, which builds on Hu Jintao's call to build a "harmonious world". It revolves around the idea of shaping a world that is open and inclusive and enjoys peace, security and prosperity. See "**Commentary: Why President Xi Strongly Advocates Building Community with Shared Future**", *Xinhua*, 22 September 2019.

²¹ *Xinhua*, no. 3, p. 9.

diplomacy, were clear manoeuvres to this effect.²² In strategic circles, there has long been an ongoing debate on China's intent that is often difficult to discern, with an emerging consensus that it wants to cement its global hegemony or domination.²³ Xi's words were an indication of China's clear rejection of the status-quo international order and intentions to remake it based on socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Hence, considering this largely explicit affirmation of China's intentions in Xi's address, what foreign policy manoeuvres and mechanisms can be expected from a CCP-led Beijing moving forward? Xi's speech made no reference to multilateral cooperation—such as through the establishment of new international or regional organisations—despite placing prominent emphasis on the importance of multilateralism traditionally. Although it did reference continued cooperation with “peace-loving countries” and a focus on mutual benefits over confrontation and zero-sum games, this was qualified as working with “progressive forces”. In the absence of such a focus on multilateralism, Xi instead asserted that China would work towards a “new type of international relations and a human community with a shared future”.²⁴

In essence, Beijing will likely push for a diplomatic practice of cooperation between homogenous states—that is, revisionist powers that have little if any contradictions with China and are willing to follow its lead in the global arena. For instance, Xi made a special note to thank China's friends from around the world—likely including Russia, Pakistan and North Korea—for supporting Beijing's efforts in “revolution, development, and reform”. Guided by an excellent personal relationship between the leaders of both the countries, Russia has acknowledged the strategic imperative for Moscow in aligning with Beijing, particularly considering China as a counterweight to the contradictory global visions and worsening relations with the US and the European Union (EU).²⁵ In a similar vein, the China–Pakistan relations are “strategically aligned on the vision of

²² Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, “**The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order**”, *Foreign Affairs*, 18 March 2020.

²³ Rana Mitter, “**The World China Wants: How Power Will—and Won't—Reshape Chinese Ambitions**”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2021; Priya Gauttam, Bawa Singh and Jaspal Kaur, “**COVID-19 and Chinese Global Health Diplomacy: Geopolitical Opportunity for China's Hegemony?**”, *Millennial Asia*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2020, pp. 318–340; Oriana Skylar Mastro, “**The Stealth Superpower: How China Hid its Global Ambitions**”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019; and Lukas K. Danner and Felix E. Martin, “**China's Hegemonic Intentions and Trajectory: Will it Opt for Benevolent, Coercive, or Dutch-style Hegemony?**”, *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2019, pp. 186–207.

²⁴ *Xinhua*, no. 3, p. 5.

²⁵ Ian Hill, “**Russia-China: An Unholy Alliance?**”, *The Interpreter*, The Lowy Institute, 14 May 2021.

growth and prosperity in the region”²⁶; Pakistan has been supporting China on its core objectives and claims in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet, border tensions with India, and Beijing’s policies toward Xinjiang region when a significant part of the international community has been condemning the human rights violations in Xinjiang and China’s belligerent actions in disputed territories.²⁷ Likewise, strategic cooperation and understanding of the need for economic and geopolitical cooperation against the democratic world have defined the traditional alliance between North Korea and China. This legacy is likely to remain the face of their bilateral friendship, with the expected extension of their 1961 treaty in the coming days.²⁸

Notably, this could imply a further breakdown in communication, consultation and compromise between the US and China—something India must be mindful of. New Delhi remains committed to an inclusive, rules-based, free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific order, wherein engagement with China is not entirely excluded. However, should Beijing resort to a diplomatic arrangement wherein the US and its allies are branded “hegemonic powers” and avenues for multilateral cooperation further disintegrate, India’s vision of an inclusive and therefore stable regional order may suffer.

Furthermore, in addressing China’s priorities for the future (which also translate to potential tools in China’s foreign policy arsenal), Xi emphasised the need to enhance China’s strength in the science and technology sector. With US–China competition rapidly intensifying, the tech domain has become a key area of contention with both states vying for supremacy in the field; Xi’s speech underscored that high-quality technological development would be central to the CCP’s plans, not only for forging a prosperous nation but also to ensure that the country’s governance continues to be based upon “core socialist values”.²⁹ In addition, technology was also cited as a vital component of the CCP’s military modernisation goals which aim to build it into a world-class force by 2035. In this context, one can expect to see China becoming a formidable regional and global maritime power.

²⁶ **“CPEC Fits Perfectly with Pakistan’s Geo-economic Paradigm: NSA Moeed Yusuf”**, *The Express Tribune*, 27 May 2021.

²⁷ **“Pakistan Says to Support China on South China Sea, Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet”**, *CGTN*, 1 December 2020; Aamir Latif, **“Pakistan Supports China on Border Tensions with India”**, *Anadolu Agency*, 17 June 2020; and Sammy Westfall, **“Pakistan’s Prime Minister Embraces China’s Policy Toward Uyghurs in Remarks on Communist Party Centenary”**, *The Washington Post*, 3 July 2021.

²⁸ Jagannath P. Panda, **“Ties That Bind: Geopolitics, Not Socialism, Underpin North Korea-China Alliance”**, *NK News*, 30 June 2021.

²⁹ *Xinhua*, no. 3, p. 8.

Notably, with the CCP maintaining absolute control over the Chinese military, the institution has fundamentally come to act as an arm of the Party. As Xi himself stated, the Chinese military is the “gun” of the Party, and a “strong pillar for safeguarding [the] socialist state, preserving national dignity, and... protecting peace in the region and beyond”.³⁰ In the coming future, Xi is resolved to enact further measures that reinforce the CCP’s authority over the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which will be better equipped and more capable of undertaking missions not just in the region, but globally too. Xi’s words here—referring to building military abilities (or capabilities) to protect “national sovereignty, security, and development interests”—are particularly noteworthy. The inclusion of “development interests” as a viable reason for taking military action essentially implies that China may take armed action if it deems its economic interests or power designs are in any way hindered—regardless of the regional norms and the rules-based order. Furthermore, Xi has already called upon all Chinese people, within China and the diaspora spread globally, to unite as a “mighty force” to actualise the goal of national rejuvenation.³¹

Such rhetoric is not only meant to project China’s hard and soft power globally but also comes as a warning to the Quadrilateral countries³²—the US, Japan, India and Australia—to be prepared to face a strong China. Beijing will continue to up the ante in its disputes with India, the South China Sea, over the Senkaku Islands with Japan in the East China Sea, and particularly Taiwan. In particular, India would likely witness a more aggressive China at its northern borders, while on the occasion of crossing the 100-year mark, the CCP will be looking to push the limits and test the resolve of its competitors; here, India would certainly be treated as a critical component in China’s strategic and foreign policy calculus.³³

Japan, too, is likely to witness an intensification of maritime activities by China in a “relentless” fashion to emphasise its claims and undermine the status quo; while viewing Tokyo with antagonism drawing from CCP’s historical experiences.³⁴ Taiwan, for its part, has gradually witnessed an increasingly aggressive China, with a reconsideration of Beijing’s peaceful approach and contemplation of armed

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 10.

³² The Quad refers to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a group of states (the United States, India, Japan and Australia) partnered in their shared desire to build a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific order, which implicitly includes challenging or confronting China’s unilateral actions challenging the status-quo.

³³ Jagannath P. Panda, [“What China’s Communist Party Centenary Means for India”](#), *National Interest*, 30 June 2021.

³⁴ Alessio Patalano, [“What is China’s Strategy in the Senkaku Islands?”](#), *War on the Rocks*, 10 September 2020.

reunification. Buttressed by the advancing military modernisation, the Chinese military is set to increase its military activities near the island, particularly as the reunification ambitions inch closer and discussions of taking over Taiwan take precedence in the CCP's power consolidation outlook. Hence, the party's priority will be to achieve its set goals and ambitions, rather than to abide by the international rules-based order; and increased aggression—both military and political—will be a part of this approach.

CCP's China and Regional Power Politics

Xi's centenary speech holds enormous implications for Asia and the Indo-Pacific region at large, making it clear that the divide between China and the rest will only intensify in times to come. The CCP-led China is prepared to face (or perhaps engage) in a long-drawn rivalry with a variety of powers, blocs and formulations. The Asian and Indo-Pacific regions are multipolar power centres, marked by the rise of powers like India, China, Japan, and more. While China's unilateral actions go against the rules-based, open and transparent *modus operandi* of "like-minded" democratic states in the region, the powers do agree in principle to the multipolar construct, themselves hoping for an "Asia for Asians" by Asians. Still, China's assertive actions are not limited to the US; territorial disputes with India, belligerent maritime claims, and focus on "reunification" of Taiwan and a crackdown on Hong Kong have marked a difference in perception between China and its Asian neighbours.

Nonetheless, Xi stated that China is a country that never bullies; but more importantly, Xi chose the centennial speech to warn that Beijing will never let "any foreign force to bully, oppress, or subjugate us". In a veiled warning, he stated that any power that did try to do so would "find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people". This message bodes ill for the Quadrilateral powers, as without addressing the grouping directly, Xi reaffirmed that CCP will continue to focus on mutual benefit and not "zero-sum games" while opposing "hegemony and power politics". Such words have been used in the past by Chinese diplomats and press to denote the Quad, viewing the grouping as "so-called Indo-Pacific NATO" that harbours a Cold War mentality and stirs up "geopolitical competition".³⁵

Keeping in mind international backlash and viewing a significant part of it as a coordinated effort to contain China's global ambitions, Xi emphasised the necessity for Beijing to promote "stronger vigilance and always be prepared for potential danger". To this, Xi—and the CCP—stated the requirement for accelerating the modernisation of

³⁵ Abhijnan Rej, "[China and the Quad: From Sea Foam to Indo-Pacific](#)", *The Diplomat*, 15 October 2020.

China's defence forces and propounding that a "strong country must have a strong military". China already aimed to achieve full military modernisation by 2035, while the 5th Plenum of the 19th Central Committee only established a new short-term marker to ensure that the PLA continues to progress towards its military roadmap with greater vigour.³⁶

Concurrently, Xi elucidated that the "Taiwan question" will only be resolved via "complete reunification"; and this remains an unshakable, permanent goal of the CCP. Having already stated that China has not ruled out the use of force to achieve this goal, strongman Xi promised the Chinese people—and the world—that "no one should underestimate the resolve, the will, and the ability of the Chinese people to defend their national sovereignty and territorial integrity".³⁷ The Quad powers, Taiwan, South China Sea claimant states and especially China's regional rival power India would be wise to view this as a warning—and build a strategic response to the same.

Xi's speech has been heralded as one that sparked "pride" and "confidence" by Chinese media³⁸; to them, stopping China from reaching its second centennial goal is not possible. To the world, the speech must emerge as a covert warning that shows Xi's determined focus to achieve glory for the country, CCP and himself. The celebrations on 1 July 2021 must emerge as an urgent reminder that China under Xi and the continued power of the CCP is only going to emerge as even more of a threat in the post-first centennial phase; Beijing is focused, it is proud, and it is dangerous, and the international order must attune itself to manage its rise accordingly.

³⁶ Brian Hart, Bonnie S. Glaser and Matthew P. Funaiolo, "**China's 2027 Goal Marks the PLA's Centennial, Not an Expedited Military Modernization**", *Jamestown Foundation*, 26 March 2021.

³⁷ Kelvin Chen, "**Xi Jinping Rehashes 'One China' Principle in CCP Centennial Speech**", *Taiwan News*, 1 July 2021; and *Xinhua*, no. 3, p. 12.

³⁸ Wang Cong and Tu Lei, "**Xi Declares Completion of Moderately Prosperous Society**", *Global Times*, 1 July 2021.

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