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THE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN " XI JINPING'S THOUGHTS ON SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS FOR THE NEW ERA".

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY.



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The education campaign " Xi Jinping's thoughts on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for the New Era". Implications for China's domestic and foreign policy.

On April 1, 2023, the Political Bureau of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held the fourth session to discuss and implement "Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era". Xi Jinping's Thought is a set of policies and ideas developed by the current Chinese leader since 2012, which brings together Marxist and Maoist principles combined with Xi's personal insights. The outcome was first presented during the 19th CCP Congress in 2017, and it became part of the PRC Constitution two years later as the core ideology that guides China's modern-day diplomacy.

The summary of this set of policies consists of 10 statements, 14 commitments and a list of achievements in 13 areas. It sets out the long-term development plan, divided into two stages. Thus, from 2020 to 2035 (stage I), China should continue its path towards technological and economic development, reducing rural-urban disparities of living standards and improving and modernizing the governance system. From 2035 to 2050 (stage II), China should be prosperous, reaching "new heights in every dimension of material, political, cultural, social and environmental progress" that will project China as a global leader.

Addressing the April 2023 session, Xi mentioned the need for CCP members and officials to study and apply the Thought in the current international context, as this effort was crucial in achieving the strategic goals set at the 20th CPC National Congress. The study has been defined as an important intellectual tool for the Beijing leadership, requiring the implementation of an education campaign on the matter in order to enhance cohesion within the Party.

What could this education campaign mean?

Internally:

- It could initiate a new stage of purging the Party members who do not fully share Xi Jinping's vision. The Chinese leader has previously used this political tool as an anti-corruption campaign since 2012, targeting both high-ranking officials and civil servants. It was stepped up in 2022, with the effect of strengthening the power of Xi's loyalists in top decision-making positions. China's current premier, Li Qiang, is one of Xi's closest officials, along with Foreign Minister Qin Gang.

- Continuing the deepening process of the ideologization and centralization of power. Under Xi's leadership, the CCP has been restructuring China's political apparatus, removing decision-making roles from government bodies and transferring them to Party organs such as small ruling groups and committees. This process strengthens the CCP's oversight of policy drafting and implementation to ensure tighter membership adherence to the party line. Xi's approach differs from past CCP leaderships, which involved more consultative bodies in the domestic and foreign policy-making process.
- The CCP's increased control in each sector has a major impact on the economy. Over the last few years, the private sector has been under pressure from the Communist Party of China through its tough regulations in areas such as technology, education, real estate, e-commerce, etc. Xi Jinping's report states that economic development is the CCP's "main task", but his speech focuses more on security. Chinese officials will prioritise strengthening security and loyalty to Xi over furthering Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms.
- The defence budget continues to increase. Starting in March this year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2%, the eighth successive increase in recent years. In doing so, the Chinese Communist Party is pursuing the strategies set out by Xi Jinping in his doctrine for China to become a global leader. The massive investment in the military sector is a first step in the nationwide effort to reunite with Taiwan, which is the main goal.

Externally:

- More assertive foreign policy and an agenda focused on national unification. Xi's thinking underpins current Chinese foreign policy, kicking off a new approach referred to broadly as wolf warrior diplomacy. Foreign policy has become more assertive with the implementation of Xi Jinping's ideology, emphasizing territorial expansion. Claiming disputed territories has become a major objective, leading to an increased military presence in the South China Sea, escalating military tensions on China's border with India, and intensified military exercises in the airspace surrounding Taiwan. Taiwan unification has been set as the main aim of Xi's leadership since the beginning of his term, and has been reiterated several times under the slogan "peaceful unification".
- Keeping the distance from the West and establishing new partnerships with states that share the same set of beliefs. Xi Jinping's thinking also stresses the concept of 'consultative'

democracy, which refers not to domestic but to foreign policy and implies parity between sovereign nations regardless of regime type. He also supports developing countries (China included) and rejects the idea of a single state or small group rule, referring to the USA and the West. Thus, according to Xi's ideology, global influence should be shifted from Washington and its allies to China and other states that would join this construct. The Beijing leadership will therefore continue to distance itself from Washington, establishing and strengthening partnerships with smaller states in South Asia and Africa. As part of its foreign policy strategy, the CCP is taking practical steps to disseminate Xi's Thought by conducting political training programs for African leaders.

- A more active role in changing the international order and quiet involvement in the conflict against Ukraine. Following Xi's Thought on distancing from the West and developing the Chinese state in accordance with current geopolitical developments, the CCP could play a more active role in the context of the current war in Ukraine. Russia could use the *No Limits Partnership* to gain Beijing's support in financing the offensive in Ukraine. Chinese officials have repeatedly invoked the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another state, whether on the issue of suppressing the Uighur minority rights or on the Taiwan issue. However, in order to promote the Chinese state as a global leader and to support a multipolar world, Beijing could intervene in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, not as a mediator, as it has attempted to promote itself, but rather as a trusted partner of Russia. The two countries share the goal of limiting US hegemony, and both have several advantages in strengthening cooperation.

Given the strategic competition between China and the US, Russia is an indispensable partner for China with its natural resources and military technology. For Russia, China would be the only viable partner that could offer financial assistance in war, as well as support in the UN Security Council.

The visit of President Macron and President Von der Leyen to Beijing occurred amidst the growing estrangement between China and Europe, seeking to prevent China from supporting Russia in its war against Ukraine. The position of the two leaders differed, with Macron choosing a speech that aligned with Beijing's vision of reducing dependence on the US and not involving European states in the Taiwan issue.

Therefore, the indoctrination campaigns of Chinese officials may lead to new developments in Chinese domestic and foreign policy. Xi Jinping is the most influential Chinese leader since Mao Zedong, and the main thrust of China's political agenda can be identified in his thought and manner he wants to change China's position vis-à-vis the major powers. The implementation of indoctrination campaigns will move the Party away from the thinking and reforms imposed by Xi's predecessors and chart a new course focused on countering Washington's influence and adopting a more assertive stance on the international stage.