



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG POLICY BRIEF

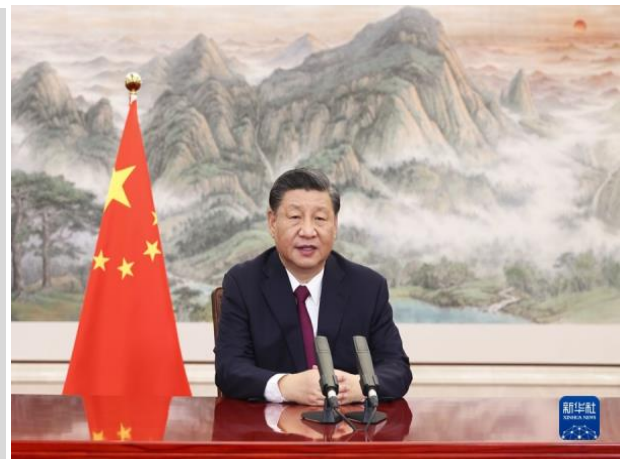
Reflections on China's Drivers, Motivations and Strategic Perceptions

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Cover Photographs:

Xi Jinping Delivers a Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022, April 21, 2022. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

Xi Jinping (C, front), Li Keqiang (3rd R, front), Zhang Dejiang (3rd L, front), Yu Zhengsheng (2nd R, front), Liu Yunshan (2nd L, front), Wang Qishan (1st R, front), Zhang Gaoli (1st L, front), Jiang Zemin (4th R, front) and Hu Jintao (4th L, front) attend the opening session of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, Oct. 18, 2017. Source: Xinhua

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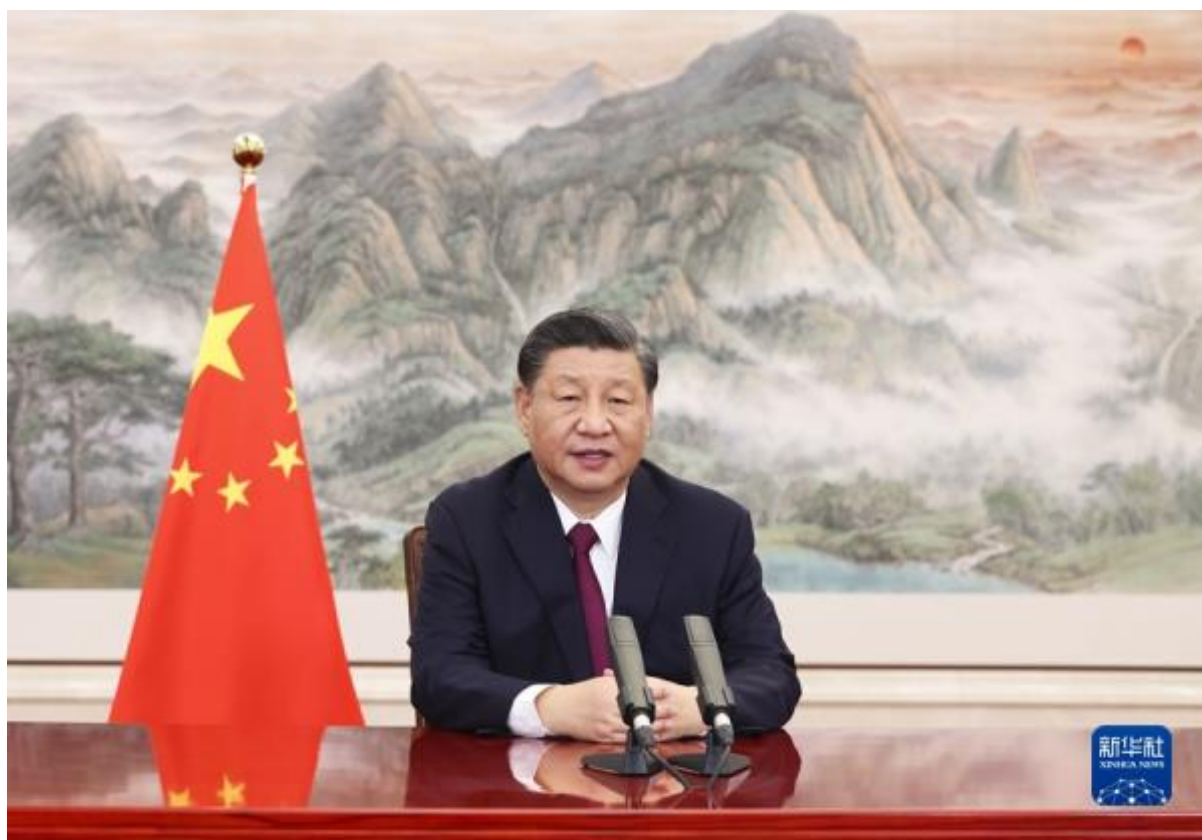
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Introduction

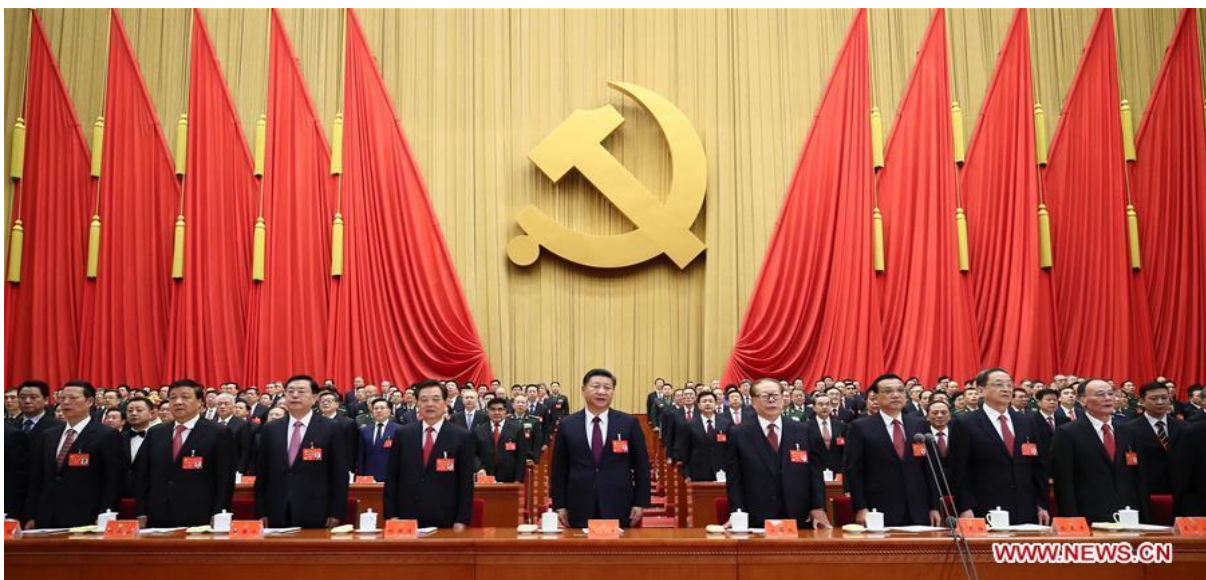
Preparatory work available in the public domain in the run up to the 20th Party Congress (PC) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) later this year provides a pretty clear picture of drivers, motivations and strategic perceptions going forward. In this context, at least four major documents come to mind. These are: the History Resolution of 11/11/2021, the Communiqué of the 6th Plenum of the 19th PC of 11/11/2021, the Joint Statement of 04/02/2022 between Russia and China titled "On the International Relations entering a New Era and Global Sustainable Development", and a detailed article in the People's Daily on 16/05/22 by Politburo Member Yang Jiezhong.



Xi Jinping Delivers a Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022, April 21, 2022. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

What is most pertinent to note is that under President Xi Jinping [XJP], while modalities have changed, the overall approach and objectives of China's foreign and security policies have remained consistent. The fundamental reasons for this include the ongoing successful layer by layer implementation of the Four Modernisations of Deng Xiaoping of 1978; the opening to the world, with positive enablement by the West in particular; the successful manipulation of international political, financial and trade institutions; and the leveraging of virtually unhindered technology transfers China was able to access.

The principal objectives of the CPC are quite clearly retention of its monopoly over power in China, ensuring domestic political stability and restoring China to its self-assessed historical glory of being the most important power and nation in the world. Much like the "centre of the world" approach.



Xi Jinping (C, front), Li Keqiang (3rd R, front), Zhang Dejiang (3rd L, front), Yu Zhengsheng (2nd R, front), Liu Yunshan (2nd L, front), Wang Qishan (1st R, front), Zhang Gaoli (1st L, front), Jiang Zemin (4th R, front) and Hu Jintao (4th L, front) attend the opening session of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, Oct. 18, 2017. Source: Xinhua

Fulfilment of the targets set for 2020-2035 are an essential requirement to achieve these objectives, which once achieved would mean that by 2050, China expects to become a global leader in terms of comprehensive national strength and international influence, and to stand taller and prouder among the nations of the world.

The XJP era is referred to as "the New Era". Interestingly, each of the six phases defined in the Historical Resolution and the 6th Plenum Communiqué, gives a

'new' dimension to the progression of the "new" China established in October 1949.

The CPC already professes that the Chinese nation stands tall and firm in the East, is already wielding a profound influence on the course of world history, and has become an important force driving human development and progress. China believes that its model of development (political, economic and social) has created a new model for human advancement and expanded the channels for developing countries to achieve modernisation.

China's leadership is more than aware that, for a variety of reasons, its continuing rise will not be uncontested. The recognition of challenges by the CPC thus is equally stark and seven aspects stand out in particular:

Corruption is recognised as the greatest threat to the Party's long term governance and hence as a major political struggle the CPC cannot afford to lose.



The Communist Party of China (CPC) opens the 19th CPC National Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Oct 18, 2017. Source: China Daily

Second, the traditional growth model cannot be sustained; the need is for quality and innovation driven growth and that requires openness to the world. It also, however, allows the outside world to create obstacles.

Third, the need for self-reliance in science and technology as the strategic pillar for China's development, and in the interim, to ensure open access to technology and world markets.

Fourth, to ensure food, energy and resource security. [The focus on food security and rural revitalisation is particularly pertinent, for it represents a critical area of possible weakness that can be exploited by others.]

Fifth, can China continue to leverage its massive market? Conditions have to be created to allow that to happen.

Sixth, to ensure that China's armed forces guarantee the CPC's continued monopoly over power, and China's security and developmental interests. [Substantial progress has been made in modernising the PLA and revamping its doctrines to meet the challenges of modern technology-based warfare. This follows from the requirement that national security is the top priority of the CPC. So too is self-defined territorial integrity. This translates into China's demand, especially in the current complex scenario, for universal, comprehensive and indivisible security. This should also be "equitable" in the Asia Pacific context. Such loaded terminology is intended to oppose development of the Indo-Pacific architecture and the QUAD, so as to protect China's interests in the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean.]

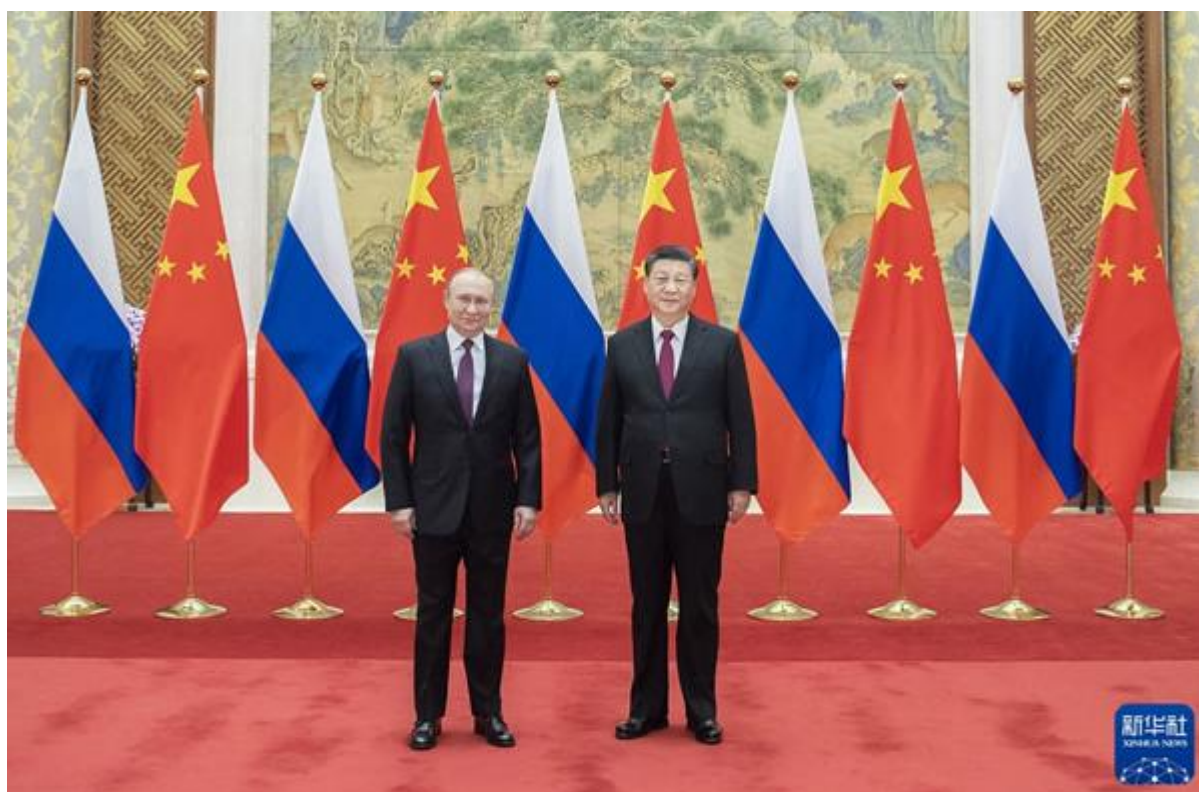
And seventh, notwithstanding its great successes China remains, in its own perception, the largest developing country in the world where the principal contradiction facing China's society remains that between unplanned and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. [In effect, there is recognition of some accountability to the Chinese people.]

Security and development are clearly China's two top priorities. Yang Jiezhong believes that China has maintained its initiative and advantageous position in the overarching strategic context and China is confident of safeguarding its sovereignty, security and developmental interests.

Notwithstanding Yang's confident assertion, in the contemporary situation, China also believes that serious efforts are under way to sabotage security and stability in China's periphery and to undermine China's core and major interests. In response, XJP has announced his new Global Security Initiative (GSI) at the Boao Forum on April 21, 2022. This defines security as the precondition for development. Earlier, at the UNGA in September 2021, XJP had presented his Global Development Initiative (GDI). The GDI and GSI are a 'new' effort to confront and overcome the challenges that China is facing in the

dramatically changed contemporary regional and international situation. Several of these changes are of China's own making.

The combined implications of the GDI and GSI require further in-depth study. Yang argues that China has five strategic conditions that favour China going ahead and these include, other than CPC rule, the solid foundation laid by China's sustained and fast development, long term and enduring stability, and a powerful drive that fills China with confidence and strength (It is interesting that a similar train of thought is also imbued in US Secretary of State Blinken's address of May 26, 2022 on the US Administration's approach towards meeting the China challenge.)



President Xi Jinping Held Talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin at Diaoyutai State Residence in Beijing, February 4, 2022. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

Looking ahead, China will in effect continue to focus on coordinating development and security, protect its territorial integrity as it defines it, prevent regime change and containment, and strengthen China's regional and global network of partnerships. The GSI will come into play here. China will take the initiative in the reform and development of the global governance system so as to place itself in a status quo plus position and strengthen processes of trade, investment liberalisation and facilitation by appropriately using the GDI framework. The latter is critical given its external dependencies in the economic, energy and S&T spheres. China's focussed efforts to mitigate climate

change, and to leverage cyber space, outer space, the Polar regions and the Deep Seas, will not falter or waiver. Nor will the single minded focus on strengthening, modernising and technologically upgrading the PLA under absolute Party control.

China has, over the last four decades plus, developed into a powerful entity that has an undisguised ambition to be at the heart of a newly minted "community of common destiny" (with China at its heart) to underpin which, it has announced and is implementing a series of initiatives including the BRI processes, trading arrangements, the GDI and now the GSI. This is backed up by the PLA, the third most powerful military in the world.

Not surprisingly, a steady push back has been taking place against Chinese actions and intentions from existing major powers and others unconvinced by China's protestations, enticements and talk of principles it does not itself adhere to. The push back has also gained momentum because of the COVID-19 experience of countries with China, its continuing predatory activities in its neighbourhood, and its upgraded alliance with Russia just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

China now fears containment and denial of technologies and markets. Its reaction to the evolving Indo-Pacific construct, the QUAD, and now the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework [IPEF], reflect an element of nervousness. China is clearly rattled, but will it blink, and if so when? The outcome of the Ukraine – Russia imbroglio may well offer some clues. But can and will Xi Jinping make strategic course corrections before the 20th Party Congress? It is best not to count on it; course corrections, if any, are likely to be incremental rather than abrupt.



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