

Chinese president expounds on his nationalist “dream”

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Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded this month’s National People’s Congress with a speech on Tuesday emphasising the nationalist themes of his “dream” of Chinese rejuvenation and a central role in world politics. As he did last year, Xi declared that China was “standing tall in the east with a brand new posture.”

“We must ride on the mighty east wind of the new era, charge forward with a full tank and steadily steer the wheel with full power, so that the giant ship of China carrying the great dream of more than 1.3 billion Chinese people will continue to cleave the waves and sail to victory with a promising tomorrow,” Xi proclaimed.

The forthright nationalist character of Xi’s speech reflects his further elevation by the congress, which approved constitutional amendments removing the limit of two five-year terms on the president. Xi’s consolidation as China’s political strongman, who can now hold office indefinitely, takes place amid growing US threats of trade war and war, as well as intense social tensions at home.

Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represent the interests of a tiny layer of multi-billionaires who have accumulated vast fortunes as a result of the CCP’s restoration of capitalism over the past three decades. His nationalist fervour, which reflects the ambitions of the ultra-rich in China for a greater say in world affairs, is aimed at securing a base of support among the Chinese middle classes and sowing divisions in the working class.

Xi pointedly stressed Chinese unity just days after US President Donald Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act authorising official visits between Taiwan and the US “at all levels,” a move that foreshadows stronger ties with Taiwan and undermines the US commitment to the “One China” policy. Washington broke diplomatic

relations with Taipei in 1979 when it de facto recognised Beijing as the only government of all China, including Taiwan.

“Safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity and realising the complete reunification of the country are the common aspirations of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation,” Xi said. “All acts and tricks to split China are doomed to failure and will be condemned by the people and punished by history!”

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province and has threatened to use military force if the government in Taipei formally declares independence from China. In another sign of the mounting tensions over Taiwan being stoked by the Trump administration, the Chinese aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, sailed into the Taiwan Strait yesterday. The Taiwanese military responded by dispatching warships and aircraft to shadow the vessel.

On the same day, US deputy assistant secretary of state Alex Wong told an audience of 700 business people and officials in Taipei that the US commitment “to the Taiwan people, to their security, to their democracy, has never been stronger.”

Washington, which backed a brutal military dictatorship in Taiwan for decades, has never been concerned with defending the democratic rights of the Taiwanese people. Rather, as it prepares for war with China, the Trump administration regards Taiwan as a crucial strategic stronghold. By strengthening ties with Taiwan, it is recklessly inflaming tensions in what has long been a dangerous flashpoint for conflict.

In his speech, Xi denied that China posed a threat to US global dominance, saying Beijing did not wish to “displace” any other country. In an implicit criticism of US aggression, he added: “Only those who are accustomed to threatening others will see everyone as a threat.”

The CCP bureaucracy has elevated Xi as a Bonapartist figure, both to defend Chinese interests against US threats and suppress mounting internal class tensions. Over the past five years, he has restructured the military and brought it more tightly under his control. At the same time, Xi has tightened censorship, cracked down on critics, and conducted an “anti-corruption” purge designed to eliminate and intimidate potential rivals and opposition.

The National People’s Congress (NPC) approved further increases in the military and internal security budgets, as well as the establishment of a new anti-corruption body with greater powers and scope. China’s spending on its internal police-state apparatus is greater than on the military, underscoring the CCP’s fear of an eruption of class struggles in China.

Xi’s pivotal political role is reflected in the slavish official adulation that is now mandatory. After Xi’s speech, NPC Standing Committee chairman Li Zhanshu declared: “Comrade Xi is the core of the Party, commander of the army and leader of the people, who is supported by the whole Party, loved and respected by the people.” He declared that Xi was the national “helmsman,” recalling the term used to refer to Mao Zedong.

The NPC installed key political lieutenants of Xi in powerful positions. Wang Qishan was Xi’s right-hand man in the anti-corruption purge before he stood down from the Politburo Standing Committee at last year’s CCP Congress due to his age. He has been installed as vice-president and, as a result of the constitutional changes, can remain in that post indefinitely.

The NPC appointed Xi’s top economic adviser, Liu He, as one of four vice-premiers. He was in charge of one of the “small leading groups,” established and led by Xi to extend his grip over key areas of policy. Liu was effectively in charge of the Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs, which now has been elevated to the status of a commission.

Xi used this group and Liu to undermine the position of Premier Li Keqiang, who is nominally in charge of economic and financial matters. Significantly, Xi sent Liu to Washington in February for discussions on the Trump administration’s trade war threats and to Davos in January to lead China’s delegation to the World Economic Forum. Liu is likely to be put in charge of reining in China’s massive debt, which threatens to

destabilise its financial system.

This year’s NPC marks something of a turning point. Confronted with threats at home and abroad, the CCP apparatus has come together around a political strongman in the desperate hope that he can avert the crises ahead.



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