Amid mounting crises, Chinese Communist Party to reappoint Xi Jinping as leader

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) congress, due to start on October 16, takes place as China confronts mounting crises on all fronts. Internally, the economy has been slowing drastically, leading to rising unemployment, particularly among young people, and sharp social tensions. Externally, the US is intensifying its aggressive confrontation with China on all fronts—diplomatic, economic and military.

The CCP congress, which occurs every five years, will be one of crisis. It is expected to break from past practice and install Xi Jinping for a third term as the party's general secretary and thus the country's president. Xi foreshadowed the change when in 2018 the National People's Congress amended the country's constitution to remove the previous two-term limit on the presidency and vice-presidency that had been in place for three decades.

The US and Western media is rife with speculation about the CCP's internal machinations and whether or not Xi will be reinstalled. In an article last week entitled, "China becomes 'hothouse' of intrigue ahead of crucial Communist party congress," the *Guardian* referred to rumours of a military coup that were trending on social media, before all but dismissing them as unfounded. It appears that the rumour was based on nothing more than large numbers of flight cancellations and unsourced videos of military vehicles.

The *Guardian*, along with other media, noted the convictions last month of top-level Chinese officials on corruption charges, describing it as "one of the biggest Chinese political purges in years." Among those jailed were former vice-minister of public security Sun Lijun, ex-justice minister Fu Zhenghua, and former provincial police chiefs of Shanghai, Chongqing and Shanxi. Those convicted were accused of being part of a clique that was disloyal to Xi.

The Indian-based Observer Research Foundation pointed out that Sun and Fu were significant figures in China's highly-sensitive security establishment. Fu had been closely involved in Xi's anti-corruption campaign, which Xi had used to bring down key political rivals. Fu was instrumental in the investigation into Zhou Yongkang, formerly the country's security chief and member of the party's top Politburo Standing Committee, who was convicted of corruption in 2015.

From top to bottom, the CCP apparatus is riddled with corruption, which has massively expanded as the regime presided over the restoration of capitalism from 1978, the plunder of state-owned enterprises and the dominance of the market over every aspect of the economy. But corruption charges against top officials are invariably the means by which factional disputes are settled behind closed doors. Prior to Xi's installation as general secretary in 2012, Bo Xilai, Chongqing party secretary and potential rival for the post, was detained and convicted of corruption charges.

The media focus on the CCP's internal party tensions clearly reflects Washington's ambitions to exploit any divisions within the Chinese regime to weaken and fracture China, which it regards as the chief threat to US global dominance.

The CCP congress is being held amid the mounting danger of world war. Even as the Biden administration has recklessly ramped up the US-NATO war against Russia, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war, it also has dramatically escalated tensions with China over Taiwan.

Beijing is acutely aware that China could be embroiled in the expanding US-led war in Ukraine and that Washington's war aims involve not only the weakening and subordination of Russia, but China as well. Despite intense international pressure, Beijing has not condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Xi's only international travel since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was to attend last month's two-day

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summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Uzbekistan. He met with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom he called an “old friend,” and declared that China would work with Russia “to inject stability and positive energy into a world rocked by chaos.”

Putin indirectly acknowledged Beijing’s fears of an escalating war. “We highly value the balanced position of our Chinese friends when it comes to the Ukraine crisis,” Putin said. “We understand your questions and concern about this.”

The Biden administration has not only intensified the US military build-up and provocations against China in the Indo-Pacific region, but maintained the extensive trade sanctions and bans imposed on China by the Trump White House. Amid deepening global financial and economic instability, the punitive trade measures have been a contributing factor to the dramatic slowing of the Chinese economy.

The latest World Bank forecast said the Chinese economy would grow by just 2.8 percent in 2022, well below China’s official target of 5.5 percent. Amid mounting debt, the economy is also plagued by financial instability, particularly in the property sector where huge corporations such as Evergrande face bankruptcy.

The CCP’s restoration of capitalism was accompanied by the claim that it would bring prosperity that would ensure the well-being of all. A growth rate of 8 percent was held up as the benchmark for achieving low levels of unemployment and social stability. The official unemployment rate, which only covers urban areas, was down marginally to 5.4 percent in July, but the youth jobless rate hit a record of 19.9 percent.

The domestic and geopolitical crises facing China are undoubtedly fuelling tensions within the CCP apparatus. Some have criticised Xi, saying he should have been more conciliatory toward the US and further opened up the Chinese economy to foreign investment. On social media, however, stridently nationalist voices have argued for militarist responses.

The government is also under mounting pressure internationally and from sections of business and the middle classes, on which the CCP has increasingly rested, to ease COVID restrictions that have successfully prevented millions of deaths.

However, amid the escalating tensions, Xi has apparently strengthened his grip on power and taken over the oversight of all areas of government policy. This includes the economy, which was in the past largely the province of the premier. Li Keqiang, who was installed as premier along with Xi and was identified with World Bank plans for further pro-market restructuring, has been largely sidelined. He is expected to be dropped from the top leadership at the upcoming congress.

Xi, however, is now routinely referred to as “the core” of the government and the party. He may well be accorded new accolades and titles at the congress. However, Xi’s seemingly unchallengeable position stems not from any inherent strength of Xi as an individual or of the CCP as a whole. Rather, in conditions of acute class tensions, he has been elevated to preside over the competing factions, mediate disputes and prevent the divisions from blowing the party and government apart.

In a perspective in 2018 entitled “Xi Jinping’s power grab: Bonapartism with Chinese characteristics,” the WSWS explained:

“Xi’s emergence as China’s political strongman is not a function of his personal characteristics, but rather is a reflection above all of the extreme social tensions wracking the country. Confronting a deteriorating economy and the prospect of social upheaval, the Chinese bureaucracy is desperately seeking to consolidate its forces around the figure of Xi—a form of rule that Marxists have classically designated as Bonapartist.”

As the article explained, Bonapartism is an inherently unstable and temporary balance of class forces. While all the signs point to Xi being installed at the upcoming congress as China’s paramount leader for another five years, his future and that of the CCP itself is far from certain. Amid the rising tide of class struggle internationally, the re-emergence of the Chinese working class will shatter the illusory strength of the regime. The crucial issue for workers in China, as internationally, is the construction of the necessary revolutionary socialist leadership capable of leading those struggles.

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