

October 27, 2021

Xi Jinping's Movements on his "United Front"

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The sole and ultimate goal of Xi Jinping's political platform is to perpetuate and absolutize the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and to ensure social stability, as Xi defines it. All goals converge on Xi's absolute leadership of the Party, with power concentrated in his own hands. This is the author's fundamental understanding of Xi Jinping's politics.

This raises the following question: is Xi's absolute leadership of the Party the guiding principle underpinning the cooperative political system (henceforth referred to as the "political consortium"), the very existence of which has often been questioned? The author has not previously had a strong interest in the work of the United Front. However, given the diversification of occupations and values, and the further intensification of international and personal exchanges, the situation surrounding United Front movements is undergoing major change.

In this paper, the author makes several initial observations on recent changes to and characteristics of the Xi Jinping administration strategy.

1. What is the work of the United Front?

According to the Ordinance on the Work of the United Front of the Communist Party of China, which came into effect on December 21, 2020, the United Front is "a federation led by the Communist Party of China, based on the Labor-Nation Alliance and including all socialist workers, socialist project builders, patriots who defend socialism, and patriots who defend the reunification of the motherland and strive for the great reconstruction of the Chinese nation" (Article 2, paragraph 1). In addition, the United Front is "an important instrument for the victory of the revolution, construction and reform projects" (paragraph 2).¹

On May 18, 2015, Leader Xi Jinping grappled with this vague general definition, citing remarks that Mao Zedong had made in the 1940s, via the following: First, he said, "The united front, armed struggle, and Party building. With these three treasures, the CCP was able to overcome the enemy during the Chinese revolution"; Second, "so-called politics exist to increase the number of people on our side and decrease the number of people on the enemy's side"; Third, "war strategy is the greatest strategy."² These comments show how important war strategy is to Xi.

Looking back at the politics of the CCP during the reform and opening-up period, from a war-strategy perspective, reveals that China's war strategy was the process of "incorporating and eliminating forces outside the Party" to "strengthen Party rule and achieve social stability."

To understand the CCP's war strategy and its development, it is important to keep the following three points in mind. First, the dual politics of "control and penetration" and "aggregation of dissent and feedback" are intended for "those who can and need to be taken in" (targets). In other words, the first step is to disseminate the Party's policies and values. This is often done unilaterally and forcefully. The second step is to identify the dissenting views of target people and groups and to provide feedback on the results of that examination. By expanding its own periphery through such interactive operations, the CCP can toughen its governance to a certain degree. Herein lies the true essence and *raison d'être* of the strategy of integration.

Second, the Party will exercise unilateral coercive force against "unreachable and unwanted" people, who are often regarded as hostile forces, through struggle, elimination, and eradication. Annihilating them both physically and psychologically will contribute greatly to the general stability of the Party and state. However, as it is impossible for the War Control Department to meet these demands alone, the cooperation and collaboration of the Party's political and legal departments and the government department of intelligence will be critical.

Third, the war effort is not limited to the domestic sphere. At the national strategic level, the “middle ground” and “three worlds” theories emphasized during the Maoist era fall into this category. Meanwhile, at the tactical level, as discussed in the author’s previous report (“United Front Operations and Chinese Overseas”), Chinese nationals at home and overseas are a key object of the war strategy.

2. Current United Front movements

To be effective, the nation’s war strategy must assume the existence of an enemy. Given the absolute value placed on strength by the Xi Jinping regime, hostility toward heretics is expected to deepen, regardless of whether they live in China or abroad. For Xi Jinping, the ethnic minority issue, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and other issues directly related to “national unity” are key elements in the “great revival of the Chinese nation.” In fact, they are perhaps the most important and sensitive targets in his war strategy. This highly important and sensitive strategic area explains why Xi vehemently denounces any foreign criticism of his harsh handling of the ethnic minority issue as “interference in internal affairs.”

In addition to the above, two other characteristics define war strategy under Xi Jinping’s administration. The first is the expansion of targeted movement. The current targets of the United Front movements are “representative figures among non-Party officials” in the following 12 categories: “members of democratic factions, independents, non-Party intellectuals, ethnic minorities, religious figures, non-governmental economic figures, members of the new social stratum, outbound and returning students, Hong Kong and Macao comrades, Taiwan comrades and their relatives living on the mainland, overseas Chinese and returning overseas Chinese and their relatives, and others who must cooperate and unite” (Article 4 of the CCP United Front Work Regulations (Draft); Article 5 of the aforementioned policy).³

These 12 categories have changed their names and numbers in accordance with leadership perceptions and the political, economic, and social conditions of the time. However, the trend is toward increasing the number of categories. The increased categories are top targets for military operations. Specifically, in December 2000, during the Jiang Zemin era, “non-governmental economic personnel (including owners of private enterprises)” and “students leaving and returning to their home countries” were added; in July 2006, during the Hu Jintao era, “management technicians at private enterprises and foreign-funded enterprises,” “employees at intermediary organizations,” and “freelance professionals” were added. In May 2015, during the Xi Jinping era, “emerging media employees” were added and the category “intermediary organization employees” was expanded to “intermediary organization and social organization employees.” All categories added from 2006 onwards were integrated into the category, “members of new social classes.”⁴

In other words, the Xi Jinping administration recognizes the “new social stratum,” identifying “management and technical staff of private enterprises and foreign-invested enterprises,” “independent professionals,” “employees of intermediary organizations and social organizations,” and “emerging media staff,” as the people with the most essential and important roles to play in achieving social stability.

The second feature involves strengthening the Communist Party leadership, which is the supreme mission of Xi Jinping’s politics. First, the central-level strategy conference held in May 2015 was changed from a “national” strategy work conference (July 2006) to the “central” strategy work conference.⁵ Since the President of the National Political Consultative Conference presided over both meetings and the General Secretary made speeches, it is unclear whether any substantive changes were made. However, as “center” generally refers to the Party Central Committee, the name change is thought to indicate a strengthening of the Party’s leadership of the war effort. The same is true of the decision to establish the Central Leadership Subgroup at the July meeting of the Party Central Politburo,⁶ which was headed by Wang Yang, the Party’s fourth-ranking official and President of the National Political Consultative Conference.⁷

In March 2018, a major structural reform was carried out of Party organs, state organs (the government, the People’s Congress, and the Political Consultative Conference), and major social organizations. During this reform, which aimed to strengthen the Party leadership by transferring authority from the State Council, the Central Planning Division unified the leadership of the National

People's Affairs Committee, incorporating both the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs and the Office for Overseas Chinese Affairs.⁸

3. Unified Front movements and “common wealth”

Ever since Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of common wealth⁹ at the 10th meeting of the Central Finance and Economic Commission on August 17, 2021, people have focused on achieving it. In the political report of the 2017 19th Party Congress,¹⁰ which introduced the full-fledged Xi Jinping era, he declared: “The new era is the era of gradually realizing the common wealth of all people.”

However, despite all the talk about projects to eradicate poverty in rural areas, the gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen. The stagnating conditions in which marginalized groups live are inexcusable. In this sense, it is highly commendable that Xi Jinping's leadership has begun to move toward realizing common wealth. As Deng Xiaoping failed to achieve his goal of realizing national and then common wealth,¹¹ Xi Jinping's efforts to secure common wealth represent a major undertaking, which will undoubtedly take him beyond the achievements of Deng Xiaoping. However, the policies introduced to achieve this goal are difficult to accept, from the perspective of a consistent Unified Front effort and the social stabilization it is expected to produce. This is because the Party's sudden and forceful crackdown has targeted two prominent characteristics of authoritarian regimes: the “rich” or new social stratum and the non-governmental economy. These have both been important targets of the recent control initiatives.

Businesses such as Alibaba, Tencent, and Didi, which are currently subject to various regulatory controls, represent the “non-governmental economy,” while entertainers and academics represent the “new social class.” As they have grown up under the Party's policy and patronage, they are important targets for the Party's Unified Front, which aims to secure the legitimacy of its rule. They impose huge fines on IT giants for violating antitrust laws and force them to make donations. Popular actresses are exposed for tax evasion, while films made by actors who once visited the Yasukuni Shrine are removed from the Internet. The Unified Front also calls for the industry to “clearly establish [its] spirit of patriotism for the Party, patriotism for the country, and respect for virtue and art.”¹² To alleviate the burden of fierce competition in entrance exams, no new cram schools will be established, and existing cram schools will become non-profit organizations.¹³ According to a close friend, who lives in China, several people have already lost their jobs. It is difficult to believe that such “punishment” will help to perpetuate the CCP rule and social stability that Xi Jinping is pursuing. This could be described as a second anti-rightist struggle.¹⁴

There is no denying the role played by countless non-governmental economic entrepreneurs and new social strata in enriching the Chinese masses and improving the nation's standing in the international community. These achievements have also been made possible by the flexibility and cunning of the war strategy, which Xi Jinping considers one of his treasures. Will Xi Jinping now abandon the “artistry” that is the essence of his strategy and pursue a single-minded path toward strengthening control? Will he try to forcefully suppress the people, who have played a role in supporting the Party? Given his strategy for consolidating power, the policies designed to achieve common wealth and the future of those policies cannot be ignored¹⁵.

¹ 「中共中央印發《中國共產黨統一戰線工作條例》」<http://www.zyztzb.gov.cn/xxgctzt/351033.jhtm> l (Last accessed on October 2, 2021).

² 「深刻認識做好新形勢下統戰工作的重大意義」中共中央文獻研究室編『十八大以來重要文獻選編(中)』中央文獻出版社、2016, p.556.

³ 「中國共產黨統一戰線工作條例(試行)全文」http://www.pingjiang.gov.cn/36768/36899/content_1794440.html (Last accessed on September 29, 2021).

⁴ 「中央統戰部時隔 11 年再設新局」<http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0705/c1001-28524022.html> (Last accessed on October 3, 2021).

⁵ 「鞏固發展最広汎の愛国統一戦線」http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/20/c_1115351358.htm (Last accessed on October 4, 2021).

⁶ 「專設統戦工作領導小組 中央”大統戦”思維昇級」<https://news.qq.com/a/20150731/043323.htm> (Last accessed on September 23, 2021).

⁷ 「中央統一戦線工作領導小組召開習近平總書記關於加強和改進統一戦線工作的重要思想研討会 汪洋出席併講話」<http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2019/10/21/ARTI1571618069769140.shtml> (Last accessed on October 1, 2021).

⁸ 「深化党和国家機構改革」<https://www.12371.cn/special/shjggg> (Last accessed on September 23, 2021).

⁹ 「習近平主持召開中央財經委員會第十次會議強調在高質量發展中促進共同富裕 統籌做好重大金融風險防範化解工作」『人民日報』 August 18, 2021.

¹⁰ 「決勝全面建成小康社会 奪取新時代中国特色社会主義偉大勝利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的報告」http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm (Last accessed on October 18, 2021).

¹¹ 「一靠理想二靠紀律才能團結起来」『鄧小平文選 第三卷』人民出版社、1993年、111 ページ。

¹² 「關於進一步加強文芸節目及其人員管理的通知」http://www.nrta.gov.cn/art/2021/9/2/art_113_57756.html (Last accessed on July 28, 2021).

¹³ 「中弁国弁印発《意見》 進一步減輕義務教育階段学生作業負擔和校外培訓負擔」『人民日報』 July 25, 2021.

¹⁴ Between 1956 and 1957, Mao Zedong called on intellectuals outside the Party to criticize the Chinese Communist Party freely in order to reform it. However, when their criticism became more severe than expected, the Party launched a merciless counterattack. Party leaders are now convinced that they took the correct course of action during this anti-rightist struggle, although they made the mistake of overextending the targets of their criticism.

¹⁵ On October 23, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress decided to introduce a pilot real-estate tax. The outcome of this important decision will greatly affect the potential realization of common wealth.