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The Power of Xi

Lee Eysturlid

Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, leysturl@imsa.edu

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THE POWER OF XI

By Lee W. Eysturliid
March 30, 2018

On March 5, the *South China Morning Post* reported that "China claims move to scrap presidential term limit has wide support." What does that mean? Sadly, this change is the first of several constitutional "reforms" that will give Chinese leader Xi Jinping control of the Chinese Communist Party, the military, and the government.

The assumption had been that Xi, like his rather conventional predecessor, Hu Jintao, would retire after two five-year terms as president. But even if Xi had retired from the post of president, he could have retained the more powerful position of premier of the party and chief of the armed forces. In China the authority of the Communist Party overrides that of the government, so why does Xi need to hold on to all these leadership posts into an indefinite future?



Weakening of the Rule of Law

Two things are now becoming clear about the reality of Chinese politics and Xi's ambitions. First, many outside China had come to hope that rapid economic development and the movement of so many people into the middle-class would result in the rise of the "rule of law" and a greater demand for more democratic institutions. It is now clear that was just wishful—although admirable—thinking. The dominance of politics by the party means that the rule of law will remain subservient to the "needs of the Party." As long as significant decisions to amend the constitution can be taken by an elite few on the Politburo's Central Committee, government power cannot be limited.

Xi's Rising Political Power

A second and weightier reality is the power that Xi has accumulated. He now controls every major facet of political power in China, and can do so for life. Ominously, the parliament just approved the merging of important elements of the party, the government, the police, and the judiciary into an organization called the "National Supervision Commission." Now any official can be interrogated, detained, and punished—a powerful tool of intimidation. Finally, it was only recently that the political musings of Xi, labelled "Thought for a New Era," were given constitutional authority.

These new, essentially unlimited, powers mean that Xi will crush any internal dissent and make himself the permanent face of a rapidly expanding China. For the rest of the world it means the hope that China would become an active player in the world's "rule-based order" is gone.

Lee W. Eysturliid
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