

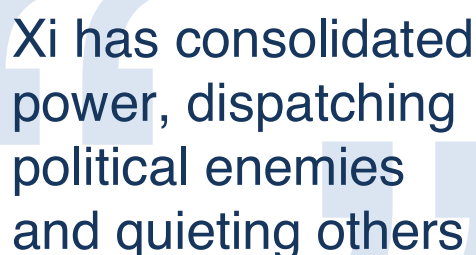
China + Politics

Geoff Raby

President Xi Jinping

The transition to the new leadership under President Xi Jinping, which began in November 2012, is now largely settled. Xi has consolidated his power, dispatching political enemies and quieting others. While he has held the formal positions of power since his ascendancy as head of the Party and PLA, he has now shown his willingness and a formidable capacity to use his power. Xi is now unchallenged, and for a time will be unchallengeable.

The ongoing anti-corruption campaign is the biggest purge in Chinese Communist Party history since the Gang of Four were ousted in a palace coup in 1976 by Deng Xiaoping. Meanwhile, Xi has consolidated in his hands control of all the key areas of policy, establishing five Leading Groups which he chairs, covering areas from national security and economic reform to internal Party affairs.



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It is clear that power is now more concentrated than at any time, possibly, since Mao in the mid 1950s.

Anti corruption campaign

The announcement that former Standing Committee member and internal security head, Zhou Yongkang, is being formally investigated on corruption charges marks the end of the first phase of the campaign. Zhou's power base was systematically and quickly dismantled with hundreds of arrests over the past year, including one of his sons and a slew of senior officials and SOE personnel, especially in Petrochina.

Before Zhou's arrest, Xi's challenger for the top job, Bo Xilai, was sentenced to life in prison on charges of corruption and abuse of power. Zhou awaits a similar fate.

It has been widely speculated that former Premiers Wen Jiabao and Li Peng – or at least their families – and even former General Secretary and President Jiang Zemin would be brought down. This is now believed to be most unlikely, not least as it risks alarming the population that China is re-entering a period of political instability but also because it would further highlight the corruption at the highest levels of the Party.

It remains clear that the campaign is not over with it maintaining widespread popular support. It is now suggested that some serving or former Ministers and Vice Ministers might still become embroiled in the campaign. People have become fed up by high-level corruption, the extravagant behaviour of the children of senior party officials, the petty abuse of power and the waste of public funds.

For Xi and his political supporters, the anti-corruption campaign and cleaning up the Party are seen as necessary to rebuild popular support for the Party and start the long process of rebuilding the Party's legitimacy. Accordingly, it will continue as long as Xi has the power to prosecute it and the will to push on as he seeks to rebuild the image of the party.

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