

CCP 20th Congress

Xi Jinping opens Chinese Communist party congress with warning for Taiwan

Sunday 16 October 2022, by [DAVIDSON Helen](#), [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#) (Date first published: 16 October 2022).

President supports peaceful reunification but will ‘never promise to renounce use of force’ as speech launches event likely to grant him third five-year term

Xi Jinping celebrated China’s crushing of Hong Kong’s autonomy, and warned Taiwan that the “wheels of history” are turning towards Beijing taking control of the island democracy, as he opened a key Communist party summit.

Xi also made a veiled attack on the US’s increasingly explicit support for Taipei, denouncing “foreign interference” for exacerbating tensions. “The Taiwan issue is China’s own problem to solve,” Xi told the 20th Communist party congress.

The most important gathering in the five-year Chinese political cycle, the week-long meeting in Beijing is expected to hand Xi another five-year term running China, cementing his position as the most powerful leader since Mao Zedong.

Xi’s address to delegates, nearly two hours long, offered a rare if opaque glimpse into his plans and hopes for the country, which increasingly answers to the orders of just one man.

He acknowledged that China faced “dangerous storms” ahead, battling economic pressures from Covid, high energy prices and the fallout from the war in Ukraine.

His response to these new challenges mostly seems to involve doubling down on the policies of his first 10 years in power – characterised by growing social control, regional aggression and rivalry with the west.

Xi’s rule has also been marked by growing persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

He said the country had increased its global influence over the last five years, and hailed the decision to crack down on Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement.

A new national security law that effectively criminalised dissent, and brought decades of de facto autonomy to an abrupt end, marked “a turn for the better in the region”, Xi said.

Many Taiwanese see the crackdown on Hong Kong as a warning of a grim future should they come under Beijing’s rule. Xi appealed to the “majority of Taiwanese compatriots” and blamed a small minority of agitators – as well as foreign interferers – for tensions. But a large and growing majority of Taiwanese people reject the idea of reunification.

China has proposed controlling Taiwan through a version of the “one country, two systems” scheme that was meant to guarantee Hong Kong’s independence. The protections were easily swept aside when Xi decided Hong Kong’s protests had got out of hand, and the port city is now effectively controlled from Beijing.

In response to Xi’s speech, Taiwan’s presidential office said a majority of Taiwan’s citizens had made it clear they “resolutely refuse ‘one country, two systems’.” The office’s spokesperson, Chang Tun-han, reiterated Taiwan’s statehood and vowed there would be no concessions in its territorial sovereignty, democracy and freedom. Chang said maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait was a shared responsibility and Taiwan was willing to work with Beijing “under the principle of rationality, equality, and mutual respect”.

Xi sees seizing Taiwan as a key part of his legacy and a requirement for China’s “national rejuvenation”. China will never renounce the option of using force to achieve it, he said, repeating a familiar talking point.

“The wheels of history are rolling on towards reunification and the rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation. Complete reunification must be realised and it can without a doubt be achieved,” Xi said on Sunday, drawing the strongest applause of the speech.

“We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force.”

Joe Biden has repeatedly promised the US would defend Taiwan if it was attacked. When the US House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, defied Chinese pressure and visited Taiwan in August, Beijing responded with aggressive military manoeuvres.

Sung Wen-ti, a political scientist at the Australian National University, said Xi’s comments about Taiwan could be viewed optimistically.

“It’s heavy on the ‘oughts’ and the ‘musts’ but pretty ambiguous on the ‘hows’,” Sung told the Guardian. “The lack of ‘hows’ is a sign he wants to preserve policy flexibility and doesn’t want to irreversibly commit to a particularly adversarial path.”

The party congress officially gathers about 2,000 delegates representing 100 million members of the Chinese Communist party, to discuss the last five years and future course for the next half-decade.

In reality the delegates are largely there to rubber-stamp the decisions of the leadership, hammered out behind closed doors in the previous weeks and months.

Xi’s speech, which gives an indication of policy focus in coming years, praised the party’s achievements in eradicating extreme poverty, running the world’s largest health and social welfare systems, advancing green energy and combatting political corruption.

A strict zero-Covid policy, which has isolated China from a world slowly trying to return to something like pre-pandemic life, will also stay in place. Xi defended his hardline approach, saying it “put people and their lives above all else”.

Xi paid lip service to the idea of rule by consensus in his speech, telling delegates: “We must accept the people’s criticism and oversight.” In reality, Beijing and the entire country have been locked down under tight security rules, in a bid to prevent any disruption to the congress.

All Beijing bridges have security guards stationed at them after a lone protester hung anti-Xi

banners off a Beijing overpass last week and was arrested. Dissent is so stifled that people are being handed permanent social media bans simply for sharing images of the protest, the Wall Street Journal reported.

“With the ubiquity of WeChat in daily life in China, this punishment is the digital equivalent of cutting an offender’s hand off. Hard to imagine a more effective tool to enforce self-censorship,” said Hong Kong-based lawyer and activist Antony Dapiran on Twitter.

On China’s Twitter-like Weibo, excerpts from Xi’s speech were eight of the top trending topics, with hundreds of millions of views and tens of thousands of comments. There was little sign of disagreement.

This party congress is the first since the removal of term limits for party leaders, allowing Xi to remain “leader for life”.

Further constitutional changes are expected this week to deepen his power and place within the party, including enshrining Xi as its “core” and his ideas as its underpinning ideology. Reshuffles within the leadership ranks are also expected to elevate Xi allies and loyalists.

Helen Davidson and **Emma Graham-Harrison** in Taipei

P.S.

- The Guardian. Sun 16 Oct 2022 07.32 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/16/xi-jinping-speech-opens-china-communist-party-congress>

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