The 18th National Congress of CPC:
Mapping China’s Course

Introduction

Amidst China’s peaceful rise, the 18th National Congress of the CPC evoked immense domestic and international attention as a turning point to reassess the performance and set the upcoming direction. The Party takes pride in the country’s gigantic economic advance and its preparedness to map China’s future orientation for the next ten years. The steering of process comes in the wake of global economic recession and challenges of diverse nature in the strategic environment. China adheres to its policy of peaceful rise which makes the US quite uneasy. Nevertheless, the fact remains that as China mount towards strengthening its economy it also faces political challenges back home and simultaneously has to deal with a bulk of military threats.

This review of China’s contemporary setting is preliminary in nature, without prejudice to a full scale analysis of various sectoral aspects regarding the agenda. In this pursuit, the writer benefited from major papers relevant to the subject along with picking up threads from a briefing given by a CPC delegation (ISSI: 22nd Nov’ 2012) in the presence of various academicians and scholars. It proceeds on the premise that in the wake of China’s status as an economic giant, it faces numerous domestic challenges with a three-fold focus: first, imbalance between economic growth and political liberation. Second, mounting disparities in the wake of growth and Third, corruption.

Context

The 18th National Congress of the CPC came in the wake of China’s peaceful rise synonyms with the advent of Ding Xiaoping’s era versed 25 years ago. In the
meantime, the issues emerged ever since the adoption of the policy need to be sharp focused in the light of accumulative experience and ground realities. The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics entailing China’s scientific approach towards economic development is supposed to convince the world with Chinese clear shift in policy of ‘Development at Home, Peace Abroad’. China continues to give a mixed signal of being engrossed in its domestic concerns so that the expectations of the Chinese people don’t mount immensely, however its rapid emergence as a global economy is already being acknowledged by the world.

**Readjusting the Party’s course**

The new General Secretary of CPC until Vice President Xi Jingping transforming to President, articulated a five-fold orientation for China:

Firstly, the congress affirmed the decisive state of building a moderate society by 2020. In this regard it summarized its experiences of development in keeping with the Marxist approach and Mao Zedong vision of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Hence, CPC decided its political orientation.

Secondly, it readjusted the index of building comparatively moderately developing society by 2020. (It was decided in the 16th National Congress that the GDP would quadruple that of the year 2000, thus amounting to GDP per capita $ 8000 by 2020). The 18th congress decided that the growth will now double this as well by consistently growing with the rate of 7% each year. Chinese economy has indeed suffered but the desired growth is feasible and encouraging for the people. Hence, goals were set up for development in other sectors: economic, technological and ecological, this is all going to be done by maturing the process of socialism with Chinese characteristics by 2020.

Thirdly, it set stage for achieving goals at the larger canvas. Keeping in view the development of socialist China the larger canvas includes promoting the ethno-politico culture, and socio-economic development which is also imperative for CPC. (In this context, the 16th National congress emphasized on the need of a socialist harmonious society, and added ‘Social development’ as the key feature with three existing goals: Fiscal funds in the sector of education, hygiene, economic, ecological and social. In this
regard the 17th National Congress introduced ecological development as a grand task which was taken as top priority by the 18th congress.

Fourthly, deepen comprehensive reform as an established principle. This implies to the vision of pursuing a democratic economically prosperous society, along with reform of economic structure and relation between the government and market; naturally amounting to ‘consultative democracy' within the idea of ‘democratic centralism'.

Fifthly, ‘scientific development for the party’, this aims at fighting the root cause of corruption.

**Posture towards the U.S.**

The CPC does not view any significant change at present in the global strategic environment. However, the fact remains that U.S. is shifting its policy of maintaining heavy presence everywhere and instead is comfortable with proxies in some of the regions. China recognizes the competition posed to it in the global arena by major powers including the U.S. and that it raises the scenario ‘Challenges as well as Opportunities’. However until now, China senses more opportunities than challenges in the overall scenario. In this setting, the Asia Pacific is viewed as a new arena of competition (perhaps at the cost of other hotspots in Asia) however; China believes that the Pacific is large enough to facilitate both China and the US, so China is not in any haste in this regard.

US remains the sole super power while China is comfortable with being a global growing economic power. However, where the Chinese economy is not in competition with the economy of the US, both the states are still interdependent. The US cannot afford to lose the Chinese market and China is not in any mood to dominate the world or reach the notion of ‘Chi-merika’. This applies to the process of decline of the West and ‘rise of the Rest’, with corresponding adjustments in the policy pursued by both the states have regional and global implications.
Appraisal

China for almost half a century projected the image of being an inward looking power co-existing in the Ding Xiaoping era, which generates a climate of trust with its neighbors. This has just been opposite to the signals transmitted in the formative phase of the revolution and the Cultural Revolution (for instance, Tibet take over). It has made a record of border settlements, permanent or ad-hoc both, except with India and undefined situation in the South China Sea.

In addition, China has always been vocal about domestic development by adhering to peaceful foreign outlook. This set pattern has indeed helped China in steadily becoming a grand economic power. The pursuit rested upon evolving its introvert policy towards being a moderately developing society which is open and accepts challenges. However, the Party’s new agenda ought to be analyzed with reference to the ‘litmus test’ of the fears manifest in the form of domestic sensitivities.

The internal environment of China faces two-faceted issues: First, there is rapid economic growth that is actually unfolding disparities within the classes of China. Second, there is not sufficient balance maintained between economic reform and up hand of political dispensation that remains incremental. Hence, in order to map China’s future course in the wake of the 18th National Congress, corruption is one of the biggest issues the Chinese political structure will have to deal with in the longer run. Growth projections and reforms for China’s economy and political structure if pursued in a proper fashion may help China take shape as a new growth model for the rest of Asia as well as the world.

Notably, despite its policy of peaceful rise, China laid the foundation of growing as a giant maritime power in 1970. It might be vocal about Asia Pacific being big enough for both US and China, but its quest for naval dominance as voiced by Deng Xiaoping is evident of its concern in the military sector. The world particularly the US cannot let go of China rising as a major naval power which is growing economically and is capable of producing complex weaponry. In this regard, now the most imperative question arises regarding China’s ability to cope up with the political challenges back
home in its pursuit of being a peaceful global economic giant along with keeping up with the military ambitions of the US specifically within Asia.

**Recommendations**

As the CPC sets the direction of China for the next ten years, centers in Pakistan should closely monitor and study the evolution of the Chinese policy in general and in various sectors of interest. This is particularly imperative because of the critical nature of the strategic partnership between both the states. The Pakistani side should formulate a study mechanism for greater and in-depth analysis of the future prospects of the relationship primarily in the wake of US pivot of Asia strategy and its policy towards the Asia-Pacific. Think tanks and academic circle may contribute for a more meaningful discourse in the pursuit.

**Selected Readings**

**Books:**


**Internet Sources:**


http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/node_7167318.htm