



## The 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party—A Situation Spotlight

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On November 17, 2022, [CNA's National Security Seminar Series](#) hosted a Situation Spotlight virtual panel discussion on the technological, military, and foreign policy implications of the recent 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ([see recording here](#)). The seminar featured Dr. David Finkelstein, Vice President and Director of [CNA's China and Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Division](#); Dr. Elizabeth Wishnick, Senior Research Scientist in CNA's China Studies Program and Senior Research Scholar with the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University; and Dr. April Herlevi, Senior Research Scientist in CNA's Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Program. The discussion was moderated by National Public Radio's Beijing correspondent, Emily Feng, who joined from Bali, Indonesia, where she was covering the G20 Summit.

### Foreign Policy Implications

Dr. Wishnick highlighted the many areas of foreign policy continuity at the Congress, including a focus on diplomacy and “true multilateralism,” the concept of “modernized, peaceful development,” and the long-standing policy of the “5 Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.” However, there were some areas of change as well. Statements in the Party Report and at the Congress highlight Xi Jinping's preoccupation with risk management. For the first time, the Party Report included a section on “holistic national security,” which identified 14 different security pillars, ranging from societal and technological security to ecological and health security. The Communist Party sees ensuring political and regime security (i.e., party supremacy)—along with economic security—as fundamental tasks of China's domestic security.

The Global Security Initiative, released in April 2022, explains the ways in which Xi wants China to play a role in the world. Some experts have highlighted the idea of “Chinese-style security,” with China working to train security forces in different countries, promote the use of surveillance technologies, and promote a vision of cyber security via its Digital Silk Road. Xi is also determined to have China participate in global rule making. Although Xi continues to criticize the “Cold War mentality” of US foreign policy and contrast it with China's approach, there are potential signs of increased cooperation and communication with the US.

### Military Developments

Dr. Finkelstein highlighted two key takeaways from the Congress. First, the CCP is urging the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to be more operationally focused. The Party Congress Report revalidated the military modernization campaign launched in 2016 and reemphasized a sense of urgency. Xi has directed the PLA to become more closely aligned with the party, more expeditionary in reach, more high-tech in emerging domains, and now more operationally forward-leaning. In addition to the push for modernization, the report calls for the PLA to increase deployments and prepare for future contingencies.

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Secondly, party leaders telegraphed a sense of rising concern about the external state of China's security. Risks, turbulence, and challenges were emphasized repeatedly throughout the Party Congress Report, Xi's remarks, and other propaganda. Notably, for the first time since Deng Xiaoping stated that "peace and development are the keynote of the times" in the 1980s, a CCP leader departed from this language. Xi stated that the "deficit in peace, security, and governance is growing" and went on to emphasize that "opportunities, risks, and challenges" for China are concurrent. Based on these developments, Dr. Finkelstein concluded that the US should be prepared for a more active PLA that may increase the frequency, duration, and scale of operations around China's periphery, or wherever the PRC sees challenges to its sovereignty. This could include the Indian border, South China Sea, Yellow Sea, or Taiwan.

## Technology and Innovation

Dr. Herlevi noted that the party's goals are for China to become both self-reliant technologically and a world leader in innovation. Specific industries of focus include semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, and critical future technologies. The Party Congress Report emphasized recent major accomplishments, as the CCP hopes to draw the public's attention to this progress. These include manned space flight, lunar exploration, deep sea and deep earth probes, quantum computing, nuclear power, new energy technology, airline manufacturing, and biomedicine. Changes to the external environment and challenges were also highlighted, such as bottlenecks hindering "high-quality development," the potential for semiconductor blockades, sanctions, and increased technological competition. Technological development has played a critical role in China's economic growth but has also had profound impacts on income distribution. The increasing use of the phrase "common prosperity," which alludes to the CCP's Marxist roots, indicates that the CCP wants technological advances to benefit all levels of Chinese society. The CCP has used this phrase to frame the recent increased regulation of the technology sector, which may continue.

## Additional Remarks | Q&A

In response to a question from Ms. Feng about how secure Xi might be feeling as he enters an unprecedented third term, panelists emphasized that it will be a struggle for China to meet the aspirations the party has set out, in particular because it has had to absorb three significant blows in recent years: (1) the rapid deterioration of US-China relations, (2) the impact of COVID-19 on China's economy, and (3) Russia's war with Ukraine (both its negative impact on China's relations with Europe and the ways it has increased support for Taiwan around the world). There is no question that Xi is confident in his leadership and abilities, but he recognizes that external threats have the potential to upset his plans and undermine his leadership. The audience also posed questions about implications of the Congress for the future of Taiwan. In response to a question about US policy, Dr. Finkelstein emphasized that shifting to strategic clarity instead of strategic ambiguity has no deterrent value. The CCP decided a couple of decades ago that any conflict with Taiwan would mean a conflict with the US. While the CCP would prefer *not* to resolve the issue militarily, Taiwanese identity has continued to evolve and solidify, complicating peaceful avenues to Beijing's desired end state of reunification. Beijing recognizes that time and trends are not on its side and that peaceful modes of reunification may be increasingly unlikely to succeed. Despite the tensions, both the US and China recognize they need to coexist. Other countries around the world are also urging the US and PRC to cooperate in other sectors, particularly on the issue of climate change.

## Additional Resources

- David M. Finkelstein, “China’s Party Congress Report Highlights New Challenges,” CNA *InDepth* (blog), Oct. 20, 2022, <https://www.cna.org/our-media/indepth/2022/10/chinas-party-congress-report-highlights-new-challenges>.
- Brian Waidelich, “China’s New Military Leadership,” CNA *InDepth* (blog), Nov. 11, 2022, <https://www.cna.org/our-media/indepth/2022/11/chinas-new-military-leadership-possible-strengths-and-weaknesses>.
- Kevin Pollpeter and Amanda Kerrigan, *The China AI and Autonomy Report*, no. 22 (Sep. 8, 2022), CNA, <https://www.cna.org/our-media/newsletters/china-ai-and-autonomy-report>.
- Rose Tenyotkin, April Herlevi, Alison Kaufman, and Anthony Miller, *Economic Statecraft: How China Legally Accesses Foreign Technologies to Build Military Capabilities*, CNA, DRM-2020-U-027240-1 Rev, Jun. 1, 2020, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2020/08/economic-statecraft-china>.

For video of this and other CNA events, please see: <https://www.youtube.com/user/VisionCNA>.

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