

HEADWINDS AFTER A HARD-LINE APPROACH

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The challenges for the Communist Party of China and Chinese President Xi Jinping are mounting by the day. In a stunning rebuke to the Communist Party's handling of the Hong Kong crisis, pro-democracy forces made massive gains in local elections held last month; 17 of the 18 district councils are now controlled by pro-democracy councillors. The election saw an unprecedented voter turnout of more than 71%.

This outcome is a strong show of support for the protesters in a first real test of sentiment in the territory since protests began early in 2019 over the introduction of a bill authorising extraditions to mainland China. In her statement, the embattled leader of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, said her government respected the results and would "listen to the opinions of members of the public humbly and seriously reflect".

It is not clear, however, if the voices of the Hong Kong street protests would be heard in Beijing where there is little incentive for Xi Jinping to change his approach. Instead he might just double down on his hardline approach as his options shrink faster than he would have anticipated when the crisis started earlier this year.

This is particularly problematic for Mr. Xi as he held the Hong Kong portfolio on the Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee before he became China's de facto emperor. He seems to have an implicit faith in his unyielding tough stance, and as he has centralised power to an unprecedented level, there is no one else to share any blame for the policies enunciated by Mr. Xi. Not surprisingly, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has reiterated that "no matter what happens, Hong Kong is a part of China" and warned that "any attempt to mess up Hong Kong, or even damage its prosperity and stability, will not succeed."

Yet the inability of the Xi regime to exercise control came into sharp relief when a massive trove of classified Chinese government documents was leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, showcasing a much more granular narrative of how China is carrying out the mass detention of Muslim Uighurs and other minorities in its northwest Xinjiang province. These documents belie repeated Chinese claims that it is sending the estimated million or more people to vocational training schools with the notional goal of combating terrorism. What is even more of an eye-opener is that Chinese embassies and consulates worldwide had been instrumental in facilitating the mass detention. Every time such details emerge, they diminish China's global credibility. It might not seem much on the surface but China's global stature does take a beating.

For Mr. Xi, this growing global backlash has enormous costs back home. There are no good options for him in Hong Kong. If he continues his hard-line approach, he will make the ground situation worse in Hong Kong but making concessions also is not a very viable option for him as it is not readily evident how far the demands might go. Though the extradition bill has been withdrawn, the demands of protesters in Hong Kong have grown to include genuine universal suffrage and an inquiry into allegations of police brutality. From Hong Kong to Taiwan where there are elections in January, there is only a short distance.

Mr. Xi's reputation as a leader who will lead China's emergence as a major power in the 21st century might also come under a cloud in so far as mainland Chinese is concerned. The delicate balance that the Communist Party has managed to evolve in the politics of China can be frayed

if ordinary Chinese believe their leadership is incapable of managing turmoil.

There is also a chance of internecine rivalries within the Communist Party flaring up as Mr. Xi's policies take a hit. He has made a lot of enemies in his drive to emerge as the supreme leader and he has been ruthless with his opponents. Some of them would be waiting in the wings to respond in kind. The Chinese economy is not doing well. There is growing internal criticism of Mr. Xi's flagship Belt and Road Initiative and the costs China is having to bear for a grandiose project, driven more by Mr. Xi's vanity than by sound economic logic. China's aggressive influence operations in other countries are also generating strong backlash, with new revelations coming out every few months. Most recently, the Australian media has reported on an alleged Chinese plot to plant a spy in the Australian Parliament which has been termed as "deeply disturbing" by the Australian Prime Minister and is being investigated now by the nation's domestic spy agency. This along with reports that a Chinese spy has applied for asylum in Australia after providing information about Chinese operations in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia and suggesting that he was "personally involved" in espionage work has damaged an already battered Chinese global image.

As pressures mount on Xi Jinping and the Communist Party, there are dangers that Beijing might want to divert attention from its own internal failures by lashing out at the world. New Delhi should guard against any Chinese misadventures even as it prepares itself to deal with negative externalities emerging out of the multiple crises brewing in Beijing.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi and Professor of International Relations at King's College London

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Register to The Hindu for free and get unlimited access for 30 days.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

Why you should pay for quality journalism - [Click to know more](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

How an idea for a 'perfect Mumbai feature story' failed to materialise

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Support The Hindu's new online experience.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com