

Xi Jinping's "Four Comprehensives"

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On 25 February 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward his political theory of "Four Comprehensives". The preliminary framework of the Four Comprehensives was advocated by President Xi during a visit to Jiangsu province in mid-December 2014. Situated in the broader framework of the vision of "Chinese Dream" to rejuvenate the Chinese nation, Xi Jinping's "Four Comprehensives" offer an official blueprint for China's future. Xi's political mantra is framed in the pillars of four slogans, namely: "comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepen reform, comprehensively govern the nation according to law and comprehensively be strict in governing the party". The first three comprehensives seem to be derived from former Chinese leaders' strategic thinking but the fourth comprehensive significantly characterises Xi Jinping's legacy in reference to his strong crackdown on official corruption. On a broader assessment, it appears that the Four Comprehensives are a direct output of the antagonistic contradictions currently faced by China, namely corruption and political control.

Since Deng Xiaoping's time, it is customary among the Chinese leadership to chalk out China's developmental road map within the form of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". This includes Deng Xiaoping's "Four Modernizations", Premier Zhao Ziyang's "One Centre and Two Basic Points" and President Jiang Zemin initiated the "Three Represents" and President Hu Jintao's idea of "Scientific Outlook on Development". Continuing this political tradition, Xi Jinping's "Four Comprehensives" exhibit a conformity to the Chinese leadership style and upholds the bedrock of the "Four Cardinal Principles providing a new addition to China's political philosophy. In addition to providing a visionary guide, these defining slogans also project a confident image and an unchallenged authority of the leadership in command.

There is a strong likelihood of affirmation and greater connect among the Chinese masses with Xi's visionary idea. The positivity lies in the attempt to build on old ideas than laying a new path. Here, the crux lies in three

key elements- economic liberalization, rule of law, fight against corruption and strengthening the Party line. In this notion of political directives, the “Four Comprehensives” are argued to carry “great weight” for China as it “[stands] at the intersection of history and the future”. In other words, Xi’s Four Comprehensives are seen to be the practical solution to realise the dream of the great renewal of the Chinese nation. But amidst such optimism, there also exists impediments to the fulfillment of the “Four Comprehensives”. These include rampant corruption, clash of power and interest within the Party and China’s economic downturn with the “new normal”- which can make the “Comprehensives” rather limited in accomplishment. Apart from the roadblocks, there also exists inherent concerns regarding Xi’s next big step to fight corruption and maintaining the rule of law- which has become a grave concern in the Chinese domestic sphere. Above all, the bigger question that needs deliberation is - whether the Four Comprehensives are part of a greater propaganda built on rhetorics or does it actually have an inherent goal of for the greater welfare of the Chinese society. It is the lack of transparency about Xi Jinping’s political agenda that makes his ‘big idea’, somewhat vague to comprehend and possible fragile to implement.

In other words, Xi Jinping’s political contribution to the ideological tradition though appears to be simple in construct but it is difficult to clearly pin down its operational part. While the ends are finitely outlined, the means to achieve the ends still remains opaque and shrouded in mystery. The strength of the “Four Comprehensives” can only be assessed by their actualisation which will also quantify Xi Jinping’s political legitimacy in Chinese history. Hence, of all the uncertainties, one aspect that remains apparent is the heavy weight of Xi Jinping’s charismatic legacy which is experiencing a rapid rise.