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→ Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)

→ Write a 250+ word response to the article.

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China's Strongman

By *The Week* Staff

Xi Jinping is China's most powerful leader in decades. What are his plans for the country — and the world? Here's everything you need to know:

How much control does Xi have?

The president has accumulated more power than any Chinese leader since Mao Zedong. He has almost total control of the Communist Party, which in turn has almost total control of the country's 1.4 billion people. His image is plastered all over the nation — on posters, billboards, and TV screens in busy plazas — leading some critics to claim Xi is building a personality cult. At the Communist Party Congress last month, Xi, 64, was elected to a second five-year term as president. But he avoided designating a successor, raising suspicions that he might break with tradition and try to stay in office indefinitely. During the congress, his political philosophy — "Xi Jinping Thought" — was enshrined in the party's constitution. Only one other leader, Mao, has been honored in such a way while still alive. Asked to name China's five most powerful people, Jeff Wasserstrom, a China expert at the University of California, told CNN: "Xi, Xi, Xi, Xi, and Xi."

Where did he come from?

The son of a revolutionary leader who fell out of favor with Mao, Xi was sent to the countryside at age 15 for re-education during the Cultural Revolution. Xi spent seven years living in a cave home but survived the upheaval by embracing the party. He became "redder than red," said a Chinese academic who knew him as a young man. Xi climbed the ranks and in 2012 was chosen as party leader, just as officials were growing nervous about their hold on the people. Party bigwigs were alarmed by the so-called Color Revolutions in former Soviet Republics and by the Arab Spring uprisings, and feared that Chinese citizens might also take to the streets. They had plenty to protest: Revelations that some officials had looted state resources to the tune of billions of dollars were ricocheting through still-new social media networks. Waving the banner of anti-corruption, Xi had thousands of officials arrested. The purge destroyed his rivals' power bases, giving him nearly total control of the party.

How did he use that power?

To prevent a democratic groundswell, Xi shut down civil society organizations and rounded up human rights lawyers and bloggers. He then cemented his authority by appointing allies to key posts: The seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, the nation's top political body, is stuffed with his cronies. Technology has given Xi and the party new Big Brother-like control over the lives of ordinary Chinese. Practically everyone in the country is under surveillance through WeChat, a "super-app" with 1 billion accounts. Users do everything through the app: pay bills, schedule doctor's appointments, post photos, apply for jobs. Conversations on WeChat are automatically censored; any reference to a sensitive topic such as Tiananmen Square or Tibet is blocked. Starting in 2020, the party will assign each citizen a "social credit score," based on data culled from WeChat and other apps, that will determine their eligibility for a mortgage, whether they can travel abroad, and more.

What are his economic policies?

Xi is not a reformer. The party has always had a large presence in state-owned enterprises, but that control has become more explicit under Xi. Most companies have a party committee, and at the big state oil companies, telecom firms, and weapons manufacturers, the head of that committee is now also the chairman of the board. Most major foreign companies in China operate through joint ventures with state enterprises, and Xi has been pushing for more party control in those as well. But it's doubtful increased centralization will sustain economic growth. While the economy expanded rapidly over the past three decades, averaging 10 percent growth a year, it started to slow in 2015. Bloated state industries are now being propped up by nearly unlimited loans from state-owned banks.

Does he have a foreign policy vision?

China should "take center stage in the world," Xi said at the party congress, and he hasn't been shy about advancing his country's leadership abroad. Since he took office, China has aggressively asserted its claim over much of the contested South China Sea, building artificial islands bristling with military bases. Xi's One Belt One Road plan involves more than \$1 trillion being spent on infrastructure projects — including ports, railroads, and highways — across Asia, Africa, and Europe, expanding China's trade and military reach. Yet Xi has sought to present an ascendant China not as a threat to the U.S. but as an equal partner. The Chinese leader wooed President Trump during his recent trip to Beijing, showering him with pomp and spectacle, in an attempt to get Trump to back off his criticism of China's trade policy. The strategy appeared to work, with Trump telling Xi, "We have great chemistry. I think we'll do tremendous things."

Can one-man rule work in China?

Chinese governance used to operate on consensus: rule by committee, a system imposed after Mao's unchecked dictatorship led to the slaughter and chaos of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. But Xi's total control of the party and ruthless purging of rivals means other officials are now afraid to speak out against bad policies — a dangerous development considering China's key role in the showdown over North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its crucial role in the global economy. "There could be an emperor's-new-clothes situation," said Zhang Lifan, a Chinese historian and critic of the government. "If there is a crisis in the future, he might not get the necessary information."

Xi's military takeover

The president's purge of corrupt or disloyal officials has included dozens of high-ranking military officers, giving him much more control over the powerful People's Liberation Army than his predecessors had. A new rule issued earlier this month requires all service members to "follow Xi's command, answer to his order, and never worry him." The shake-up is intended to speed Xi's overhaul of the armed forces. The army is cutting 300,000 enlisted troops — slimming the military to 2 million personnel — and directing more resources to the naval, air, and missile forces that will allow China to project its might abroad rather than simply defend its borders. Earlier this year China launched its second aircraft carrier and opened its first overseas base, in the strategically located East African nation of Djibouti. "If I look out to 2025," Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in September, "I think China probably poses the greatest threat to our nation."

Response Options:

- First, summarize why the article's title is "China's Strongman." How, specifically, does Jinping fit that description?
- Then, explain why this matters. What does it have to do with the North Korea crisis, or with the world at large? How does it relate to the United States?
- Finally, what do *you* think?