

Opinion: Reflections on President Xi's 2019 New Year speech

OPINIONS

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Editor's note: *Dr. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, awarded the China Reform Friendship Medal, is a CGTN anchor, a public intellectual, an international corporate strategist and an investment banker. The article reflects the author's opinion, and not necessarily the views of CGTN.*

Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year speech stressed confidence and anticipation, appreciating the achievements of 2018, while looking ahead to the challenges of 2019 – recognizing realistically “all sorts of risks and challenges”, including a world at large that is “facing a period of major change not seen in a century”.

Xi's speech continued themes from his speech at the 40th anniversary of reform and opening-up on December 18, here focusing on the annual review of the previous year and the annual policy priorities for the coming year.

When Xi listed China's achievements in 2018, we get a sense of priorities: high-quality economic development, pollution control,

people's well-being, and regional coordination. He stressed big science, like China's Chang'e-4 lunar probe and second aircraft carrier.

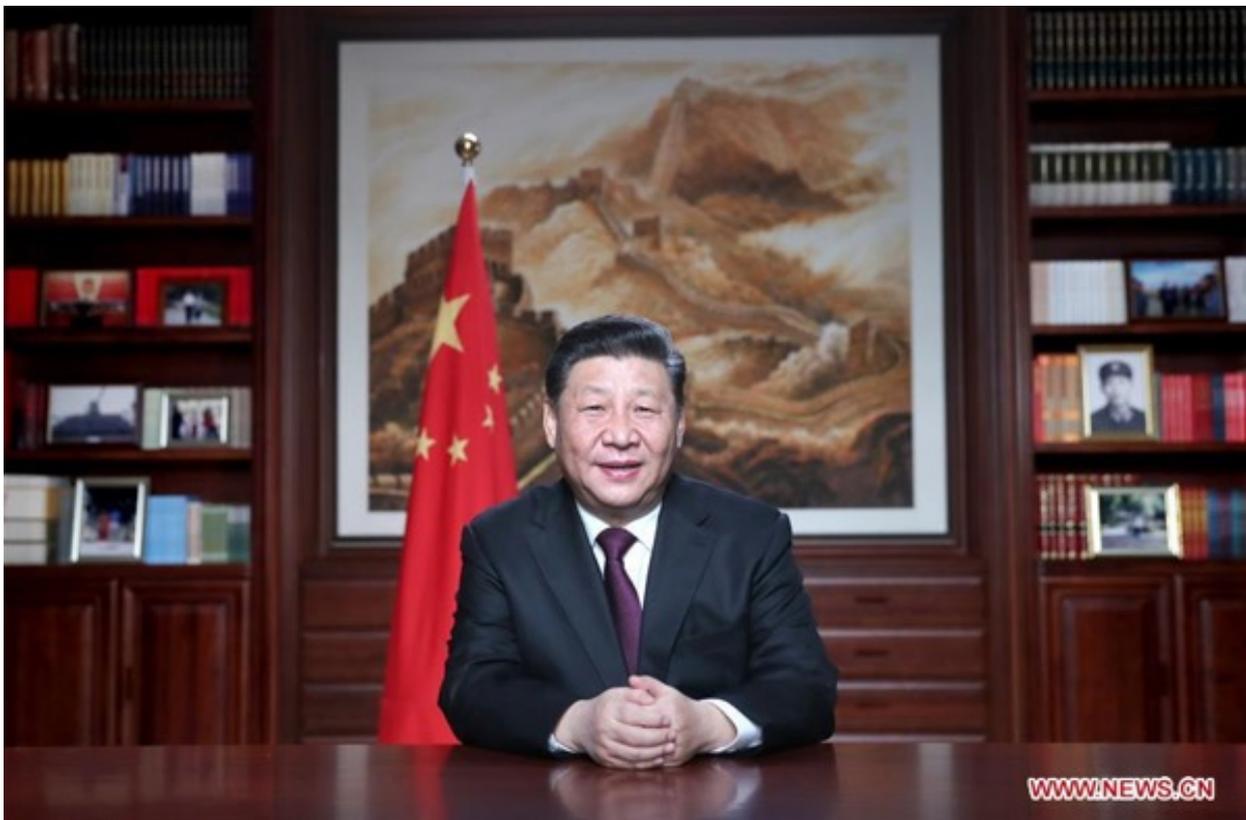


China successfully launched Chang'e-4 lunar probe in Xichang, Sichuan Province, December 8, 2018. /VCG Photo

There was no doubt that poverty alleviation remains President Xi's priority. He lauded 2018's accomplishment of lifting another 10 million poverty-stricken rural residents out of poverty, crediting "over 2.8 million officials living and working in villages, and the local village leaders". Xi singled out people living in hardship, whom he had visited, and he reinforced the importance of poverty alleviation again at the end of this speech.

Judging simply by the number of words, or amount of time, devoted to the diverse topics that affect the nation, one can see easily that poverty alleviation continues to be President Xi's most important commitment and personal priority.

Xi highlighted the comprehensive and systematic overhaul of Party and state institutions, and 100 major reform measures, vowing that China's reforms will never stop, and its doors will only open ever wider.



Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a New Year address in Beijing, China, December 31, 2018.
/Xinhua Photo

Xi reviewed China's international engagements, recognizing that although China “faces a period of major change” in the world at large, China will continue to (i) defend national sovereignty and security, (ii) push ahead with the “joint construction” of the Belt and Road initiative (signifying it is not only a Chinese project), and (iii) advocate development of “a community with a shared future for mankind”.

Significantly, Xi highlighted one specific new policy, a nod to private business: cutting taxes and fees to ease the burden on enterprises.

Xi looked ahead to the big event of 2019 – the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In recognizing that China has “braved thorny paths and confronted stormy weather over the past 70 years”, he was acknowledging some of the contemporary problems, so that his core message was clear: “despite the complexities and difficulties we may face on the road ahead”, the Chinese people will be “self-reliant and work diligently”.

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