China Today is a Product of June 4

Li Weidong – President, China Strategic Analysis Magazine

It has already been thirty years since the June 4, 1989 “incident” in Tiananmen Square. The young generation in China has almost no knowledge that this massacre occurred, while the rest of the world has almost forgotten the profound influence that the “Beijing incident” has had on the structure of the world today, with only a small number of survivors still holding annual memorials and reflections on the event. But it was exactly this event and others like it that have given today’s China its political configuration, and fundamentally changed the world’s political and economic structure. Following June 4, the West has developed a tendency to make a series of misjudgments towards China, allowing it to replace the Soviet Union and Russia as the free world’s most powerful economic and political rival. Meanwhile, reformers and dissidents within China, because of limited and shrinking international support, have no power to redirect the course of Chinese history.

1. How June 4 created today’s China

Before June 4, 1989, there were in fact three political forces in China, locked in a contest with each other. The first, represented by Zhao Ziyang, was a reform faction that tended towards democracy; the second, represented by Chen Yun, was a conservative faction that adhered to the autocratic system (Chen at that time was China’s “elder statesmen” as the leader of the Central Advisory Commission); the third, represented by Deng Xiaoping, was a limited reformist faction that wanted to reform the economic system while holding on to the political system. Throughout the 1980s, because he supported Zhao, Deng backed economic reform while promoting political “reform” (this was not systematic reform, but instead repairing the original socialist system). But, at the same time, he supported the so-called Four Cardinal Principles (upholding Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought, the socialist system, the leadership of the Communist Party, and proletarian dictatorship). When the people and students raised demands for further political reforms and received support from Zhao, Deng joined with the more conservative Chen faction to implement repression and a coup, overthrow Zhao and put him under house arrest until his death in 2005. It could be said that June 4 was the result of a nearly decade-long game of chess by conservatives to block reform. Ultimately, the demonstrations in 1989 aroused Deng’s conservative tendencies, which won out over reform. At the same time, Deng also changed himself from the chief architect of reform and opening up to the culprit of the massacre.

The June 4 massacre has brought about the following consequences for Chinese politics. First, the Communist Party once again ended the process of the Chinese people’s century-long pursuit of democracy (the first time was when Mao Zedong ended the Republic of China) and returned to autocratic dictatorship. Second, the ultimate succession of the “bloodline second red generation” was ensured (not necessarily Xi Jinping, but definitely someone who was a child of one of party leaders in the early People’s Republic era). This had always been advocated by Chen Yun, and, after the transition period of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, power finally fell into the hands of the second red generation with Xi Jinping. Third, the suppression of the democracy movement set the course for unbridled plunder and corruption through officials’ crony capitalism (Deng emphasized the market economy and respect for economic equality after June 4, but because the conservatives won in 1989, they once again took advantage of the market opportunities provided by Deng and successfully plundered wealth into their own hands). Fourth, the voices of all of the factions that advocated democracy and freedom were suppressed, leaving no room for criticism and opposition. Finally, Mao Zedong’s extreme leftist socialist system for the poor was officially transformed into right-wing bigwig bureaucratic capitalist domination under the banner of socialism. Today's China is no longer in any sense a socialist country, but a right-wing red empire that domestically implements the oppression of crony capitalism, and externally strives for hegemony. I coined the term “red empire” in 2013 because, although he is not an emperor, Xi Jinping had already by that time established a “Führer system” similar to the Third Reich of the 1930s. If we say that Mao established the first red empire in China, then Xi has established the second red empire; from Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao was only a transitional period between the two.