

**THE SIXTH PLENUM AND
THE FUTURE OF
XI JINPING'S REFORM**

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EAI Background Brief No. 1188

Executive Summary

1. The Sixth Plenum of the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from 24 to 27 October 2016 had finally granted Xi Jinping the leadership “core” (*hexin*) status that he had sought for a long time.
2. The officially sanctioned reference is now “the Party central leadership with comrade Xi Jinping as the core”, replacing “the Party central leadership with comrade Xi Jinping as the general secretary”. Xi’s predecessor, Hu Jintao, never attained this status.
3. Xi’s attempt to centralise power in his hand is in part a reaction to the excessive diffusion of power that allowed oligarchical power blocs to emerge within the CCP, leading to inefficacy in policy and reform, as well as corruption.
4. Xi first pursued institutional centralisation of power by establishing a number of powerful “leading small groups” headed by him. His pursuit of “core” status represents his attempt to shore up personal authority.
5. Signs of resistance and compromise to Xi’s move include the reiteration in the Sixth Plenum documents of “collective leadership”, “intra-party democracy” and the prohibition against personality cult. Earlier attempt, at the beginning of 2016, to install Xi as the core had failed.
6. The plenum is part of Xi’s broad political agenda of “the four comprehensives”: *comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepen reform, comprehensively implement the rule of law and comprehensively governing the Party strictly*. The Sixth Plenum focused on the last comprehensive while the third, fourth and fifth dealt with the other three separately.
7. Xi’s political vision for China is centred on a virtuous, disciplined and competent Leninist ruling party. He regards such a party as the main political advantage of China and the key to national rejuvenation.

8. However, he is stricken by an acute sense of crisis caused by the rampant corruption in the ranks of the Party, giving him the determination to rescue the party handed down by his father's generation of revolutionaries. Xi's party building and rectification programme has seen resurrection of some Maoist traditions.
9. Xi's plan to revive the Party as revealed in the Sixth Plenum includes three components: rebuild a healthy human ecology within the Party; re-establish ideological faith; and beef up intra-party supervision.
10. His new core status will only be useful to him to shore up his authority or advance his political vision if he is able to assemble a leadership team of his own at the 19th Party Congress late next year. In so doing, Xi alone will have to shoulder the responsibility for the success or failure of the reform.