

**DECIPHERING THE TWO ABRUPT TURNS  
OF THE XI JINPING REGIME**

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## Executive Summary

1. Barely one year old and the nascent Xi Jinping regime has engineered two abrupt turns, one to the left and the other to the right. The sharp oscillation raises fundamental questions as to the nature of the Xi regime and its policy directions.
2. To the great dismay of liberal reformers, Xi criticized the accepted view of political reform along the lines of democratization, the rule of law, human rights, universal values, separation of power etc. as Westernization. He reaffirms the “three self-confidences”, that is, the CCP is self-confident in the road it has chosen, in its guiding ideology and in its political system.
3. The new regime has tightened media control, intensified ideological indoctrination and launched a coordinated assault on “constitutionalism.” Many Maoist traditions are resurrected, such as the massline, political and ideological work, frugal living, rectification of “work style”, class analysis etc. Xi has stressed the Party’s ideological unity based on Marxist orthodoxy.
4. However, the Third Plenum unveiled a bold reform package, the scope and depth of which far exceeded general expectations. It calls for further market liberalization, redefining the role of the government in both the economy and society, rationalization of state bureaucracy and bureaucratic procedures, land reform, law-based public administration and social governance etc.
5. Xi’s abrupt left turn is therefore interpreted by many as a political ruse to consolidate his power and to mute leftist resistance to bold economic reforms. But there is more to the development.
6. The left turn also reveals a deep trauma inflicted on the CCP by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which according to Xi is attributable to the lack of ideological faith that renders party organizations inept when crisis hits. It also reflects the imprint of Xi’s youth growing up in the Mao era.

7. More fundamentally, the sharp oscillation is indicative of Xi's lack of a clear vision for China. He is led by either his own political instinct or the neoliberal intellectuals who dominated the drafting of the reform packet. His reform impulse has been hijacked by the right because he is incapable of translating his Maoist inclinations into actionable reform programs.
8. Xi has emerged as a strong leader with the determination to forge ahead with reforms. His reforms are problem-driven, pragmatic instead of ideological. Despite his Maoist inclinations Xi is likely to end up as a Dengist reformer, albeit tinted with Maoist populism.
9. The Third Plenum reform package, if adequately implemented, will fundamentally alter the socioeconomic environment in which the political system operates and compel political reforms as well. Xi's leftism is thus unlikely to reverse the path of reform.