

**A ROADMAP FOR THE XI ERA: THE  
CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S  
THIRD “RESOLUTION ON  
HISTORY”**

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## **Executive Summary**

1. On 11 November 2021, the Communist Party of China (CPC) released its Third Resolution on History in a hundred years, which is opportune, both in Chinese politics and at a turning point of China's development. It paves the way for Xi Jinping's third term at the 20th Party Congress and rise to become a paramount leader, as well as provides a roadmap to the remaining Xi rule and beyond.
2. Unlike the past ones, the third Resolution does not resolve any major issues. It is more of an expression of Xi's power and ambition to become a leader on par with Mao Zedong.
3. The Resolution enumerated CPC's achievements in the past 100 years in general and in the nine years under Xi in particular. Xi's reforms are more comprehensive, integrated and systemic than those of his predecessors. Xi has attempted to achieve a grand synthesis of the past four decades of reforms and opening up, and painstakingly drawn a vision to unite the Party and rally the nation.
4. Two thirds of the Resolution are devoted to Xi's achievements so far and vision for the future. The 13 areas of reforms by Xi in the past nine years are on-going and will continue. These achievements hence also provide the roadmap for the future and justify Xi's continued grip on power beyond his two terms.
5. The CPC under Xi claims that China has blazed a new trail to development that can provide the world with a "China plan" that is distinct from the dominant Western model in the past few hundred years, and that socialism in China has a track record of solving many problems that other systems have failed to solve.
6. Xi's reforms, which are characterised by re-centralisation, resurrection of ideology, strengthening of Party control and expansion of Party organisations, emphasis on the state-owned sector, curbs on local government initiative, cadre inaction and so on, are the exact opposite to the conditions in China's fast-growth years, an indication that Xi's new model is in many ways untested.

7. The Resolution can somewhat serve as the basis of a new national consensus. It is expected to silence the quarrel between the Maoist left and liberal right that has troubled Chinese politics for decades. However, the downplaying of the Party's dark past may lead to a repeat of its mistakes given Xi's Maoist tendencies.
8. Internationally, China has decidedly departed from the Western mainstream. Xi's rise raises the fear of a powerful new dictator and a possible new Cold War. The rift with the West in general and with the United States in particular is set to widen further. Xi's call for a "new great struggle", to some extent underwritten by his tenacious personality, indicates further assertiveness and non-compromise.
9. To deal with the deteriorated international environment, China may engineer its own brand of decoupling from the West to reduce its external vulnerability. China is the only major nation with the organisational strength and internal cohesion to weather off the turbulence the world is undergoing now.
10. The CPC may be betting on the resurgent tide of socialism around the world to sweep it into a global leadership role.

# **A ROADMAP FOR THE XI ERA: THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY’S THIRD “RESOLUTION ON HISTORY”**

Lance L P GORE\*

## **The Historic Juncture**

- 1.1 On 11 November 2021, the Communiqué of the Sixth Plenum of the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) announced the passage of the much-hyped third “resolution on history” titled “Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century”. The full text was released one week thereafter on 17 November.
- 1.2 The timing of the Resolution is opportune, both in Chinese politics and at a turning point of China’s development. The reform and opening up era was necessitated by the decade-long Cultural Revolution (1966 – 76) that left the country in ruins. When Deng Xiaoping emerged victorious from the post-Mao jostling for power, the nation was ready for a fresh start at a new direction. There was a nationwide discrediting of the communist ideology and a sense of crisis of being left behind in modernisation by the capitalist world in general, and by the neighbouring East Asian Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs) in particular prevailed. Reform and opening up, it seemed, was the only option and the whole country embarked on it enthusiastically.
- 1.3 The resulting rapid economic growth created many ideological difficulties for the communist regime, which prompted the third-generation leadership under Jiang Zemin to come up with *ad hoc* innovations such as “the three represents”.<sup>1</sup> China was a diligent student and avaricious learner of capitalism. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the Communist Party of China represents, instead of the proletariat as a Leninist party is supposed to, “the requirements of the development of China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of the development of China’s advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China”.

fundamental incompatibility between a capitalist market economy and Leninist party rule remained. The regime forged ahead with market-oriented reforms and globalisation in spite of it, until the 2008 financial crisis emanating from the Wall Street. The year 2008 was also the year of the Beijing Olympics, which signified the coming of age of a new China.

- 1.4 The 2008 financial crisis also fundamentally undermined the Chinese regime's confidence in Western capitalism and many features of the communist rule began to creep back in the second term of CPC General Secretary Hu Jintao's reign. Despite the underlying unease, Jiang and Hu persisted with the Dengist somewhat open-ended reform and opening up policy. Their exploration and experiments prepared the ground, both material and ideological, for Xi Jinping's grand synthesis of market economy and communist polity, and his reconnecting to the orthodoxy of communism from Stalin to Mao.
- 1.5 China's meteoric rise, the difficulties of capitalism and liberal democracy under globalisation and a profound technological revolution gave Xi Jinping the confidence to articulate a new vision for China and an alternative road to development for the world. It took him almost two full terms to muster enough power and authority, surmount the obstacles and prepare the nation for the formal ushering in of the new Xi Jinping era of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". The historical Resolution of the Sixth Plenum is the roadmap for that era henceforward.

### **The Objective**

- 2.1 This instrumental approach was laid down by Xi Jinping in his speech at the inaugural conference for the on-going campaign of "studying the party history" on 20 February 2021. Xi thus set the parameters for the new Resolution : "We must insist on the Party's two prior Resolutions on historical issues as well as the relevant spirit of the Party Centre; accurately understand the mainstream and essence of the

party history; and correctly and scientifically evaluate the major events, important meetings, and major personalities of the party”.<sup>2</sup>

- 2.2 The stated objective of the third Resolution on History is described as “[t]he whole Party should try to understand why the CPC succeeded in the past 100 years and know how it can sustain the success in the future, ... Through such reflection on its history, the whole Party should fulfil its original aspiration and founding mission more firmly and consciously, and better promote socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era”.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.3 The CPC adopted its first historical Resolution titled, “Resolution on Several Questions in the History of the Party” on 20 April 1945 at the CPC’s wartime base at Yan’an, Shaanxi province. The second one titled, “Resolution on Several Questions of the History of the Party since the Foundation of the People’s Republic of China”, was passed by the CPC Central Committee on 27 June 1981. The first Resolution consolidated the authority of Mao Zedong as the supreme leader of the CPC, upon an intra-party consensus of Mao’s repudiation of his ideological rivals and a political line of deepening the CPC’s allegiance with Stalin’s Soviet Union. The second Resolution established Deng Xiaoping as the paramount leader while firmly setting the nation’s course on reform and opening—the “basic line of socialism at the preliminary stage” that supposedly would last for at least 100 years. Both the resolutions aimed at putting controversial historical issues to rest.
- 2.4 This third Resolution similarly aimed at establishing Xi Jinping as the new paramount leader without repudiating any past mistakes as the previous two resolutions did. Instead, it builds upon the Party’s achievements in the past 100 years in general, and the past nine years under Xi’s stewardship in particular, in order to concentrate on the future. Xi aimed to boost the legitimacy of the Party and claim its entire legacy, as well as consolidate his grip on power. It summarised the major

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-03/31/c\\_1127278288.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-03/31/c_1127278288.htm), accessed 19 November 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The official press release on the 31 August 2021 Politburo meeting that formally decided on a new resolution on history as an agenda item of the Sixth Plenum in November; see *Xinhua News Agency* release on 31 August 2021 at [http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/31/c\\_1310160056.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/31/c_1310160056.htm), accessed 15 September 2021.

achievements of the CPC in the past 100 years and the lessons learnt from them and positioned Xi on par with Mao and Deng as the third landmark in the history of the CPC.

- 2.5 However, unlike Mao and Deng who had had decades of proven track record before their canonisation to paramount leader, Xi only had nine years of arduous fight to gain recognition, with a prior record undistinguishable from those of many peer bureaucrats climbing the career ladder. He had to distinguish himself with a clear vision and roadmap capable of rallying the whole party. Hence, two thirds of the 37,000 Chinese character-long Resolution is devoted to Xi's vision for the future via his achievements in the previous nine years. It constitutes a roadmap for the future because the CPC will build on and complete what Xi has started since 2013. This necessitates Xi at the helm for its successful implementation. Xi would thus conveniently have to stay on beyond the normal two terms.

### **The Achievements and Lessons of the Past Century**

- 3.1 The Resolution described the CPC's endeavour over the past century as "the most glorious epic in the history of the Chinese nation over thousands of years". It put the achievements of the CPC in the context of national history instead of a larger scheme of the international communist movement. From that perspective, the Resolution summarised the Party's historical footprint in five points.
- 3.2 The Party's endeavours over the past century have (i) fundamentally transformed the future of the Chinese people; (ii) opened up the right path for rejuvenating the Chinese nation; (iii) demonstrated the strong vitality of Marxism; (iv) profoundly influenced the course of world history and (v) made the CPC a forerunner of the times.
- 3.3 These assessments are on target without too much exaggeration, despite the lack of clarity about "the strong vitality of Marxism" given that the main characteristics of Party policy in the previous four decades are capitalistic instead of Marxian in nature.

- 3.4 The third Resolution on history made a conscious decision to gloss over the mistakes and blunders committed by the CPC in its 100 years of history. The main purpose of the Resolution is the affirmation of the Party's historical role in bringing China where it is now, and the laying down of the justifications and premises for its programmes for the future. In its claim to summarise the entire party history so far, the Resolution has merely accepted wholesale the conclusions of the previous two resolutions. However, in doing so, the many unresolved underlying problems relevant to the CPC now and in the future have been left unaddressed.
- 3.5 Based on the glowing achievements of the Party, the Resolution drew 10 lessons that the CPC will uphold in the Xi era henceforward: “(1) upholding the CPC's leadership as the premise of China's continued success; (2) putting the people first as the primary principle of regime legitimation; (3) advancing theoretical innovation to keep Marxism relevant; (4) staying independent; (5) following the Chinese path—be confident on the road the CPC has chosen; (6) maintaining a global vision; (7) breaking new ground to maintain the Party's adaptive capacity; (8) standing up for ourselves—be prepared to fight any adversaries, that is Xi's “great new struggle”; (9) promoting the united front and (10) remaining committed to self-reform so as to prevent the aging and ossification of the late communist party of the Soviet Union”.<sup>4</sup>

### **Roadmap for the Xi Era**

- 4.1 There is nothing new in these 10 lessons because the CPC has been hammering them for decades. The real substance of the Resolution is in *Part IV: A New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*. The new era was officially opened at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. The guiding light of this new era is the newly canonised “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”, described as the culmination of Marxist basic tenets adapted to Chinese

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<sup>4</sup> Cf., Zbigniew Brzezinski *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1989 and Robert Wesson. *The Aging of Communism*. New York: Praeger, 1980.

realities and Chinese fine culture, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents<sup>5</sup> and the Scientific Outlook on Development.<sup>6</sup>

4.2 The Resolution states that Xi Jinping Thought is “contemporary Chinese Marxism, 21st century Marxism, the cream of the Chinese culture and Chinese spirit of the epoch”. It put forward “a series of path-breaking new ideas, new thoughts and new strategies” with regard to such fundamental questions as “What kind of socialism with Chinese characteristics to insist and develop in the new era, and how to insist and develop it? What kind of socialist modern strong nation to build, and how to build it? What kind of long-ruling Marxist party to build, and how to build it?”<sup>7</sup>

4.3 Despite the characteristic ambiguity of the CPC’s statements at this level of abstraction and the coded language, the Resolution did make it clear that Xi’s new era is in the context of “once-in-a-century changes” taking place in the world, in which the CPC faces new challenges and new struggles. The Resolution also enumerated the extraordinarily comprehensive and wide-ranging reforms that Xi Jinping had taken on in the previous nine years. These are on-going and will continue in the future. In this sense these outlined reforms serve as the roadmap for the remainder of the Xi era—however long it may last, and possibly beyond. The comprehensive reforms that Xi Jinping has been pushing in the past nine years are categorised into 13 areas.<sup>8</sup> The following summaries highlight only the part in each area indicative of policies and strategies that will carry on in the future.

#### Upholding the Party’s overall leadership

4.4 Recentralisation is the hallmark of the Xi regime. Upon assuming power, Xi established several “leading small groups” under his stewardship, on top of the existing power structure. Most of them have been later formalised as

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<sup>5</sup> This is Jiang Zemin’s contribution to the CPC’s ideological reformulation.

<sup>6</sup> This is Hu Jintao’s contribution to the CPC’s ideological adaptation.

<sup>7</sup> Curiously, this part was omitted from the official English version of the Resolution.

<sup>8</sup> The summaries in the following section of this brief highlight the part in each area that is indicative of policies and strategies that will carry on in the future. The headings are official (sometimes awkward) translations from the original document in Chinese and all quotes in this section are from the Resolution.

“Commissions” to become a permanent fixture of the Party establishment. Right before the 19th Party Congress (2017), Xi managed to gain the status as the “core” of the Party leadership, a status denied to his predecessor Hu Jintao. Xi and his supporters also hammered constantly on “absolute loyalty”, “four consciousnesses” and “two upholdings”,<sup>9</sup> while beefing up the rules, disciplines and institutions to ensure the authority of Xi. A major institutional restructuring has been implemented to merge the Party with the government, consolidating the Party’s control over the people’s congresses, the government, the CPPCC, the supervisory, judicial and procuratorial organs of the state, the armed forces, enterprises, public institutions, grassroots-level people’s self-governance organisations and other social organisations. This new governance model will be strengthened and improved in the foreseeable future.

#### Exercising full and rigorous self-governance

- 4.5 Party-building pre-occupied the entire first five-year term of Xi Jinping, beginning with a relentless anti-corruption campaign that has persisted to this day and brought down over 400 senior cadres at the provincial-ministerial level or above. It has reformed the rules and procedures for cadre selection and promotion and combatted “a blatant culture of pointless formalities, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance, and a prevalence of privilege-seeking attitudes and behaviour” among cadres. Party disciplines are made more stringent than the law, now forbidding “presumptuous comments on the decisions of the Central Committee” (妄议中央). Xi has brought back selected Maoist legacies and practices of intraparty governance, such as criticism and self-criticism, massline, absolute loyalty, total obedience, ideological purity, information control, suppression of freedom and speech and thought, obsessive political correctness, encouragement of informants, personality cult and so on. He has devoted great effort to re-kindling the ideological faith of Party members and strived to establish clearer rules governing every area of Party activity. In the future the CPC will become more Leninist and domineering, and

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<sup>9</sup> The “four consciousnesses” refers to the consciousnesses of enhancing political integrity, developing a better understanding of the general picture, following the core leadership of the Central Committee, and acting consistently with CPC Central Committee policy; the two upholds refer to “uphold General Secretary Xi Jinping’s core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole, and uphold the Party Central Committee’s authority and its centralised, unified leadership”.

anti-corruption will remain the Sword of Damocles over all cadres to keep them in line. A powerful new party-state agency, the Commission on Discipline Inspection and Supervision, is established to unify the enforcement of Party discipline and state law.

#### Pursuing economic development

- 4.6 Xi has engineered several significant transitions that are set to continue in the future: from high-speed growth to high-quality development; from extensive growth to one being innovative, coordinated, eco-friendly, open to the world and shared;<sup>10</sup> from export-led growth strategy to a new “dual circulation” growth model, with self-reliance in science and technology being a key pillar; from “letting some people to get rich first” to “common prosperity”. Supply-side structural reform will continue, and so will “preventing the runaway (or disorderly) expansion of capital”, as well as heading off financial risks.

#### Deepening reform and opening up

- 4.7 Comprehensiveness characterises Xi’s reforms. The passage of the reform package by the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress (November 2013) marked a turn in Chinese reform approach from one of trial-and-error to one which is integrated and systemic, encompassing reforms of economic, political, cultural and social systems, and those pertaining to ecological conservation, national defence and the armed forces, as well as Party building. China is committed to further opening, free trade and globalisation: “For China’s development to gain the upper hand, seize the initiative and have a good future, it is essential that we follow the tide of economic globalisation, leverage the strengths of China’s massive market, and pursue a more proactive opening up strategy”.

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<sup>10</sup> These five make up Xi’s “new development concept”, which builds on Hu Jintao’s “scientific outlook on development”.

#### Advancing political work

- 4.8 This refers to efforts at consolidating and improving China's basic political system. The main areas include modernising China's system and capacity for governance and what has become the newest buzzword, "full-process democracy", defined as "the law-based participation of the people" in the entire political process: democratic elections, consultations, decision-making, management and oversight. The CPC envisions a trinity of "the Party's leadership, the running of the country by the people and law-based governance", and is firmly against "the erosive influence of Western trends of political thought, including constitutionalism, alternation of power between political parties, and separation of powers".

#### Comprehensively advancing law-based governance

- 4.9 Development in this area is probably the most consequential for China's political development in the long run, described by the Resolution as "a profound revolution in China's governance". It is also where Xi poses a sharp contrast with Mao, who was proud of being a "lawless and God-less" revolutionary. Law-based governance is perhaps the greatest lesson Xi has drawn from the Cultural Revolution. Like the anti-corruption institution building, law-based governance is a major part of Xi's effort to "cage power with institutions". As stated in the Resolution, "when the rule of law prevails, the country will prosper, but should it weaken, the country will descend into chaos".

#### Driving cultural advancement

- 4.10 Here "culture" encompasses not only values and traditions, but also ideology, propaganda, social sciences, philosophy, the culture industry, online public opinion and trends, and so on. The primary objective here is to enhance national cohesion, forge national identity and increase national self-confidence—all around the leadership of the Party. The CPC attaches great importance to the internet as the main ideological battleground, and has begun purging Western popular culture and capitalist values and practices such as money worship, hedonism, ultra-

individualism and mistreatment of workers. It has promoted instead “core socialist values” at three levels:

- i) *national values*: prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony
- ii) *social values*: freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law
- iii) *individual values*: patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship

Contrary to Mao’s cultural revolution, the Xi regime glorifies certain themes in the Chinese traditional culture as underpinning the national identity of China “that enables us to gain a firm footing amidst global cultural interaction”.

#### Promoting social advancement

4.11 Improving people’s livelihood is the CPC’s primary strategy to gain people’s support and ensure regime longevity. It has just achieved its first centennial goal of eradicating absolute poverty, following it up with a programme of rural rejuvenation. The new emphasis on “common prosperity” promises new measures to improve income distribution, employment, childcare, education, social security, medical services, elderly care, social assistance and housing support. New initiatives include promoting fair and higher-quality education and off-campus tutoring. Xi’s dictum “Housing is for living in and not for speculation” will continue to be upheld to reduce the cost of living. A campaign is currently waged to fight organised crime and uproot Party officials who backed it. The CPC will continue to develop a Party organisation-led urban and rural community governance, featuring a combination of self-governance, rule by law and rule by virtue in order to continue its “miracle of long-term social stability”.

#### Spurring ecological advancement

4.12 Xi’s famous dictum “Lucid waters and lush mountains are gold and silver mountains” marked a major departure of Xi’s more holistic approach to development from previous growth models. According to the Resolution, “sweeping, historic and transformative changes” have happened in this area. Accountability for ecological conservation is incorporated into cadre performance evaluation. China is more

active in global environmental and climate governance, and has pledged to reach peak carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

#### Strengthening national defence and the armed forces

4.13 The Resolution claims that the country is “confronted with various types of external encirclement, suppression, disruption and subversion”. The PLA’s (People’s Liberation Army) primary duty is to defend the leadership of the CPC and China’s socialist system, as well as promote China’s national rejuvenation. The Resolution stresses “the fundamental principle and system of absolute Party leadership over the military” and full implementation of “the system of the CMC chairman<sup>11</sup> assuming overall responsibility”. The programme for military modernisation aims to achieve the centenary objectives of the PLA by 2027; complete the modernisation of national defence and the armed forces by 2035; and achieve the status of world-class armed forces by the mid-21st century.

#### Safeguarding national security

4.14 According to the Resolution, China faces “unprecedented external pressure, intertwined traditional and non-traditional security threats and frequent ‘black swan’ and ‘grey rhino’ events”. Xi has pursued a “holistic approach to national security”, covering political, military, homeland security, economic, cultural, social, technological, cyberspace, ecological, resource, nuclear, overseas interests, outer space, deep sea, polar and biological security issues, among others. In this security vision, political security is regarded as “our fundamental task, economic security as our foundation, military, technological, cultural, and social security as means of guarantee, and international security as the support”.

#### Upholding the One Country, Two Systems policy and promoting national reunification

4.15 Due to heightened security threat from the “anti-China activities” in Hong Kong, the central government has to enforce “overall jurisdiction in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions”, implement the principle of patriots

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<sup>11</sup> Central Military Commission, a Party organ chaired by Xi Jinping.

governing Hong Kong and Macao, as well as better integrate the two regions into the country's overall development. For reunification with Taiwan, the Resolution claims that "time and momentum are always on our side".

#### Bolstering the diplomatic front

- 4.16 The Resolution takes a similar gloomy view of the international situation in Xi's new era: a time of turbulence and transformation that pose unprecedented external risks and challenges. More specifically, "the international balance of power is undergoing profound adjustments; unilateralism, protectionism, hegemonism and power politics are posing greater threats to world peace and development, and the backlash against globalisation is growing". Nevertheless, the CPC is confident in handling it well for it is now "equipped with stronger institutions, firmer material foundations and a more proactive mindset for realising national rejuvenation". The CPC wants to show the world that the Chinese nation has achieved the tremendous transformation from standing up again and growing prosperous to becoming strong. Promoting "a new type of international relations", "building a human community with a shared future" and supporting the international system centred on the UN are the stated goals of Chinese diplomacy in Xi's new era, with an emphasis on developing nations.

### **An Assessment**

- 5.1 Clearly, Xi wants to mark his era by breaking new grounds and opening up new frontiers both at home and abroad. However, there is almost nothing in the Resolution that has not been touted by the Party previously. Xi's main contribution is pulling them together in a coherent and systemic package, with a new label—Xi Jinping Thought. Together, these 13 areas of reforms amount to a blueprint of a sort. In each of the 13 areas, a roadmap is offered to guide the way forward. Xi is confident that China has something important to offer to the world and his confidence comes from China's track record of the past four decades. Xi's historical legacy is to turn China from consumer to a contributor of modernisation by offering a new vision for the world.

- 5.2 The CPC under Xi claims that China has blazed a new trail to development that can provide the world with a “China plan” (*zhongguo fang'an*) distinct from the Western model which has been dominant in the past few hundred years. It is a socialist road of innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development that is high-quality but without the income polarisation. This Chinese model of development pushes for the simultaneous and coordinated advancement of “material civilisation, political civilisation, spiritual civilisation, social civilisation and ecological civilisation”.
- 5.3 The CPC believes that such capability of simultaneously pushing for multiple goals in a coordinated and integrated manner is rooted in the comprehensive institution building with Xi Jinping as the chief architect. All of the 13 areas involve substantial rule-making and institution building. However, these are uniquely CPC and cannot be replicated by other countries. That alone will seriously limit the applicability of “the China plan” or Chinese model of development in other countries.
- 5.4 In addition, there are several other weaknesses. First, institution building under Xi Jinping has relied heavily on his personal commitment and willpower to see it through. Second, institution building is supposed, in Xi’s own words, “to cage power”; however, in practice Xi has used it to enhance his own power and authority; the sustainability of institution building after Xi’s departure hence remains a big question mark.
- 5.5 Third, Xi’s personal style and approach is characterised by comprehensiveness, with multiple areas and levels of institution building being forged ahead simultaneously. At the implementation stage, especially at the lower levels of the Party-state, the effort tends to be spread too thin to be effective. Lower-level cadres are immobilised by the anti-corruption campaign and demotivated by the re-centralisation that takes away their power and autonomy to embrace Xi’s reforms whole-heartedly.
- 5.6 Fourth, institution building relies too much on “top-level design” and leaves too little initiative to spontaneous local innovations and autonomous forces in society. Fifth, while Xi has in place a comprehensive array of formal institutions, it will take decades for the supportive informal norms and culture to evolve, not to mention that Xi’s institutional reforms that concentrate power in the hands of Party chiefs as well

as party organisations are impeding that evolution. For example, Xi's effort to change the culture of the rule by man into one of the rule by law is contradictory to the centrality of power in his rule as well as that in his vision for China.

- 5.7 Last but importantly, there is a misattribution in Xi's China model. China's developmental success so far occurred under conditions of marketisation, rise of the private sector, decentralisation, de-emphasis of ideology, loosening of party control, atrophy of grassroots party organisations, local government initiatives and so on. While Xi's China model claims the success that these factors have generated, the model he presented has almost the exact opposite attributes—re-centralisation, resurrection of ideology, strengthening of Party control, expansion of Party organisations, renewed emphasis on state-owned sector, shortage of local government initiative, cadre inaction and so on. Xi has presided over a major slowdown in growth in the past decade. In other words, Xi's "China model" is in many ways new and untested. It is far from clear if China under Xi will be smooth sailing as before.

### **Implications**

- 6.1 The implications of the Resolution or the blueprint it outlines are many, profound and far-reaching. Xi indeed has put an end to the wavering and unclear model that characterised the previous administrations. By decree, it also put to rest the incessant debate between the Maoist left and the pro-Western liberal right.
- 6.2 With the mention of a pantheon of political leaders in successive order from late supreme leaders Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, as well as former presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, to Xi Jinping, Xi managed to claim the entire history and legacy of the CPC and therefore the rightful heir of the CPC's cause and the next paramount leader. The Resolution positions him well for the 20th Party Congress next year.
- 6.3 However, this resolution is perhaps more instrumental than the two previous ones. The downplaying of the dark side of the Party's history while focusing on its achievements may lead the Party to repeat its mistakes given Xi's Maoist tendencies.

On the other hand, the Resolution does seem to have broad-based support or acquiescence from both inside and outside the Party. At least no major objection has been detected so far.<sup>12</sup> The PRC will forge ahead in this direction for the foreseeable future, with adjustments or even reversals in some areas along the way. For example, the policy associated with the “common prosperity turn” is still too sketchy and hence carries uncertainties, a situation the Party claims it could overcome as a party of learners and adapters.

- 6.4 Internationally, China has decidedly departed from the Western mainstream of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. Xi’s rise arouses the fear of a powerful new dictator and opens up the prospect of a new Cold War. The rift with the West in general and with the United States in particular is set to widen further. China’s new posture of “the great struggle”, in part underwritten by Xi’s tenacious personality, indicates further assertiveness and non-compromise.
- 6.5 To deal with the deteriorated international environment, China may engineer its own brand of decoupling from the West and turn inward. Cutting down external vulnerability is consistent with the Party-state’s objective of self-preservation. Moreover, the benefits and opportunities that China used to enjoy have been seriously diminished by Trump’s trade war and will be further curtailed by the emerging coalition of liberal democracies against China.
- 6.6 China is prepared for a long-term stand-off with the West. It is now propagating its own universal human values in competition with liberalism. First released by Xi in his 100th anniversary speech, these values are “peace, development, equality, justice, democracy and freedom”. The CPC also supports a world order centred on the United Nations system, as well as building “a community of shared future for mankind”. The Resolution declares that China will chart a new type of international relations and adopt a proactive strategy of opening up by leveraging its massive market size.

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<sup>12</sup> Which may well be the result of tightened information and debate under Xi.

- 6.7 One piece of possible good news though is about Taiwan. By claiming that time and momentum are on China's side, the likelihood of a forceful reunification on the PRC's initiative may have been reduced.
- 6.8 In the CPC's mind, China is the only major nation with the organisational strength and internal cohesion to weather off the turbulence and transformation the world is undergoing now; it is one of the few states capable of setting definitive goals and engineering programmed changes for their attainment. That capability constitutes one of CPC's "four confidences"—confidence in its own system. In contrast, many Western nations, the United States included, are experiencing internal turmoil and have difficulties in setting national goals. The weakness of the Western system exposed since the 2008 financial crisis helps to accentuate the CPC's strength, though the same strength could also lead to mistakes.
- 6.9 Last but not the least, the CPC seems to be betting on the resurgent tide of socialism around the world to sweep it into a global leadership role. The massive and concerted theoretical effort of Chinese scholars in the thousands of Party schools across the country, as well as the numerous "School of Marxism" on the campuses of all major colleges and universities seem to suggest so. The CPC claims that the superiority of socialism lies in its capability to resolve the problems that other systems have failed to resolve, and China does have a proven record in this regard. A more ambitious goal of the CPC is to be a locomotive for propelling the advancement of human civilisation in the new era.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee: *The Chinese Communist Party: Its Mission and Contributions*, available at [http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/26/c\\_1310148193.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/26/c_1310148193.htm), last accessed 7 December 2021.