

**CHINA'S 20TH PARTY CONGRESS:
XI JINPING SECURES A
THIRD TERM AND
HIGHLIGHTS SECURITY**

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Executive Summary

1. At the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, Xi Jinping, 69, started his third term as the Communist Party of China (CPC) general secretary and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), stacking the Politburo and its Standing Committee (PSC) with his loyalists.
2. In Xi's report, "security" (*anquan*) appeared 91 times, up from 55 times in 2017, while his use of "reform" declined to 51 from 69. That China was in a "period of strategic opportunity" (*zhanlue jiyuqi*) or that "peace and development remain the themes of the era" was no longer mentioned.
3. Shanghai Party Secretary Li Qiang, now ranked No. 2 in the PSC, is poised to replace Li Keqiang as China's next premier in March 2023. Zhao Leji, now third in the PSC, is likely to head the National People's Congress, while Wang Huning will take over the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.
4. Cai Qi replaced Wang Huning as the first secretary of the party's central secretariat. Ding Xuexiang, Xi's chief of staff, will likely replace Han Zheng as executive vice premier in March 2023. Li Xi became secretary of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission.
5. The informal age criterion of 68 for leaving the Politburo was invalidated at the Congress by cases of Xi himself, Zhang Youxia, 72 and Wang Yi, 69.
6. China's Ambassador to the United States Qin Gang joined the CPC Central Committee, a rare honour for any Chinese ambassador. Wang Yi and Qin Gang appear well suited to promoting Xi's more muscular international stance.
7. Of the 17 Politburo members that are not PSC members, 13 were new faces, among whom Shandong Party Secretary Li Ganjie, 57, was the youngest. Li Shulei, Zhang Guoqing and Chen Jining were also in their 50s.

8. According to the Party Charter amendment, all Party members are now obliged to uphold Xi Jinping's core position in the Party Central Committee and in the Party.
9. Xi emphasised political, economic, military, technological, cultural and social security in his political report.
10. The new CMC line-up indicates the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s operational readiness for a contingency in the Taiwan Strait. The Congress added "opposing and containing Taiwan independence" to the Party Charter.
11. The absence of an heir-apparent has added uncertainty to future succession.
12. While the Party will continue to exercise strict ideological control, the crackdown on businesses could be relaxed for a while to urgently stimulate a sagging economy.
13. Although there are few signs to suggest an easing of the zero-COVID policy soon, the Party Congress has boosted the leadership's confidence in cross-border travel.
14. A new set of promotion criteria is in play to reshape the leadership team and avoid disruptive power struggles, with the following apparent order of priority — loyalty to Xi, performance, technocratic background and age.

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Xi Stacks Politburo with Loyalists for His Third Term

1.1 The Communist Party of China (CPC) convened its 20th Party Congress from 16 to 22 October 2022 in Beijing, reshuffling the ruling party's leadership and setting the political and policy direction. Xi Jinping, 69, started his third term as CPC general secretary and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), lining the Politburo and its Standing Committee (PSC) with his loyalists (Table 1).

TABLE 1 FACTIONAL ALIGNMENTS IN THE PSC SINCE 2012

	Members connected to Xi Jinping	Members connected to Hu Jintao	Members connected to Jiang Zemin
18th Party Congress (2012)	Yu Zhengsheng and Wang Qishan	Li Keqiang and Liu Yushan	Zhang Dejiang and Zhang Gaoli
19th Party Congress (2017)	Li Zhanshu and Zhao Leji	Li Keqiang and Wang Yang	Wang Huning and Han Zheng
20th Party Congress (2022)	Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi		Wang Huning

Source: Compiled by the author.

1.2 Xi Jinping, Zhao Leji, 65 and Wang Huning, 67 remained on the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, the top echelon of power. They were joined by newcomers including Li Qiang, 63, Cai Qi, 66, Ding Xuexiang, 60 and Li Xi, 66 (Table 2). Based on the principle of seniority, all new Standing Committee members were chosen from incumbent Politburo members. The Politburo shrank to 24 members from 25, with no female representative in the group for the first time in 25 years (Table 2). Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Chairman of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Wang Yang, both aged 67, had to leave

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the PSC because no Politburo member serves four consecutive terms¹ except for the paramount leader himself.

- 1.3 Shanghai Party Secretary Li Qiang, now ranked No. 2 in the PSC, is poised to replace Li Keqiang as China’s next premier in a parliamentary session in March 2023. Unlike most of his predecessors who had been promoted to premiership, Li has no experience as a vice premier. When Xi was Zhejiang party secretary, Li was his chief of staff and his top aide between 2004 and 2007. Li’s appointment demonstrates that Xi places loyalty and trustworthiness above all else.²

TABLE 2 NEW POLITBURO AND ITS STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2022

Politburo Standing Committee		
Name	Age	Position(s) before the 20th Party Congress
1. Xi Jinping	69	CPC general secretary, CMC chairman, China’s president
2. Li Qiang*	63	Shanghai party secretary
3. Zhao Leji	65	Secretary of Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission
4. Wang Huning	67	First-ranked secretary of the CPC Central Secretariat
5. Cai Qi*	66	Beijing party secretary
6. Ding Xuexiang*	60	Chief of the General Office of CPC Central Committee
7. Li Xi*	66	Guangdong party secretary
* New members		
Other Politburo Members		
Name	Age	Position(s) before the 20th Party Congress
1. Ma Xingrui*	63	Xinjiang party secretary
2. Wang Yi*	69	State councillor, foreign minister
3. Yin Li*	60	Fujian party secretary
4. Shi Taifeng*	66	President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
5. Liu Guozhong*	60	Shaanxi party secretary
6. Li Ganjie*	57	Shandong party secretary
7. Li Shulei*	58	Executive deputy director of CPC Central Propaganda Department
8. Li Hongzhon	66	Party secretary of Tianjin municipality
9. He Weidong*	65	Commander of the Eastern Theatre Command
10. He Lifeng*	67	CPPCC vice chairman, director of National Development and Reform Commission
11. Zhang Youxia	72	CMC vice chairman
12. Zhang Guoqing*	58	Liaoning party secretary
13. Chen Wenqing*	62	Minister of State Security
14. Chen Jining*	58	Beijing mayor
15. Chen Min’er	62	Party secretary of Chongqing municipality
16. Yuan Jiajun*	60	Zhejiang party secretary
17. Huang Kunming	65	Director of CPC Central Propaganda Department
* New members		

Source: Compiled by the author.

¹ Li Keqiang was a Politburo Standing Committee member for three terms between 2007 and 2022, while Wang Yang acted as a Politburo member for two terms between 2007 and 2017 and was a Politburo Standing Committee member between 2017 and 2022.

² “Who is Li Qiang, the man poised to become China’s next premier?” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/24/who-is-li-qiang-the-man-poised-to-become-chinas-next-premier>, accessed 25 October 2022.

- 1.4 Zhao Leji, now ranked third in the PSC, is likely to head the National People's Congress (NPC), while Wang Huning will take over the CPPCC. Cai Qi replaced Wang Huning as the first secretary of the party's central secretariat, which is responsible for the day-to-day running of key party affairs. Ding Xuexiang, Xi's chief of staff who has never been a governor, provincial party secretary or minister will probably replace Han Zheng as executive vice premier in March 2023. Li Xi became secretary of the anti-corruption body of Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, taking over from Zhao Leji.
- 1.5 Xi's preferences were evident. According to China's official *Xinhua News Agency*, Xi 'personally' vetted the selection of the top CPC team, with "political integrity" and "clean governance" being the primary criteria.³ Since April 2022, Xi had personally spoken to 30 senior leaders to seek their opinions and exchanged views with other PSC members, the report said.
- 1.6 The informal age criterion of 68 for leaving the Politburo was nullified at the Congress by cases of Xi himself, Zhang Youxia, 72 and Wang Yi, 69. Zhang, a veteran of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, retained his position of CMC vice chairman. Like Xi, Zhang is a native of Shaanxi province, and their fathers were known to be close friends.⁴ The promotion of the long-time foreign-policy hand Wang Yi indicated the CPC's plan to continue with its "wolf warrior" diplomacy. China's Ambassador to the United States Qin Gang, a trusted aide to Xi, joined the elite CPC Central Committee at the Party Congress, a rare honour for any Chinese ambassador. Wang and Qin appear well suited to promoting Xi's more muscular international stance.
- 1.7 Of the 17 Politburo members that are not PSC members, 13 were new faces; Shandong Party Secretary Li Ganjie, 57 was the youngest. Li Shulei, Zhang Guoqing and Chen Jining were also in their 50s (Table 2). These young politburo members are more likely to enter the Standing Committee at the next Party Congress

³ "Xinhua Headlines: How the CPC's new central leadership was formed", <https://english.news.cn/20221025/ba4e4b6d652740c38ebb64471d383735/c.html>, accessed 25 October 2022.

⁴ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/new-military-leadership-appointments-show-china-is-bracing-itself-for-conflict>, accessed 25 October 2022.

than their peers, with some even emerging as potential successors to Xi Jinping or Li Qiang.

- 1.8 Many technocrats with backgrounds in military, aerospace, public health, environmental engineering or other strategic industries have been promoted into the Politburo. Ma Xingrui, Zhang Guoqing and Yuan Jiajun all rose through the aerospace industry, while Yin Li is a highly experienced health professional. Li Ganjie studied nuclear safety and had worked as an engineer at the National Nuclear Safety Administration. Liu Guozhong majored in artillery system fuse design and manufacturing, and has a graduate degree from the Harbin Institute of Technology. Chen Jining earned his PhD degree in civil and environmental engineering at Imperial College London. Their promotions reflect the rising priority of industrial innovation and national security in the Xi administration.
- 1.9 Xi promoted Chen Wenqing, the 62-year-old minister of state security, to the Politburo. Chen, who also secured a seat in the CPC Central Secretariat, is expected to head the party's top security body, the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission. Wang Xiaohong, China's police chief, also joined the Central Secretariat. The appointments underlined Beijing's growing security concern in the face of tensions with the United States and its allies.⁵
- 1.10 Party elders were no longer assured of political influence at the Party Congress. Jiang Zemin, the 96-year-old former general secretary and Zhu Rongji, 93-year-old former premier were absent from the opening and closing sessions, though their names were on the presidium standing committee. Hu Jintao, the 79-year-old predecessor of Xi, sat beside Xi at the closing session, but he was unexpectedly escorted out of Congress in front of the world media.
- 1.11 The 20th Party Congress agreed to incorporate into the Party Charter "new developments" in "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

⁵ "Security mission in focus with Xi Jinping's key Communist Party appointments", <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3197094/security-mission-focus-xi-jinpings-key-communist-party-appointments>, accessed 25 October 2022.

for a New Era” since the 19th Party Congress in 2017 (Table 3).⁶ The “new developments” indicate Xi’s increasing influence in policymaking, and new changes and directions in China’s socioeconomic and foreign policies brought about by Xi. “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” was not upgraded to “Xi Jinping Thought”, which would have equated it with “Mao Zedong Thought”, nor was Xi awarded any new designation.⁷

TABLE 3 WHAT HAVE BEEN ADDED TO OR REVISED IN THE PARTY CHARTER 2022

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1. The new developments in Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era since the 19th Party Congress.
 2. The Party’s original aspiration and founding mission, and major achievements and historical experience over the past century.
 3. A statement on carrying forward the Party’s fighting spirit and building up fighting ability.
 4. A revision to reflect China’s realisation of the First Centenary Goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and its march towards the Second Centenary Goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in every way possible.
 5. Statements on basic socialist economic systems, the goal of common prosperity, a new philosophy of innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development, high-quality development and a two-step strategic plan (years 2035 and 2049) for socialist modernisation.
 6. Xi’s new ideas on the rule of law, whole-process people’s democracy (*quanguocheng renmin minzhu*), national defence, armed forces, the united front and foreign affairs.
 7. Statements on “resolutely implementing the policy of One Country, Two Systems” and “resolutely opposing and deterring separatists seeking Taiwan independence”.
 8. Statements on the adaption of Marxism to the Chinese context, on the Party’s self-reform and corruption prevention.
 9. Upholding Xi Jinping’s core position in the Party Central Committee and the Party as a whole and supporting the Central Committee’s authority and its centralised, unified leadership become the obligations of all Party members. Members’ other obligations include studying the history of the Party, strengthening consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity, thinking in big-picture terms, following the leadership core, keeping in alignment with the central Party leadership and staying confident in the path, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.
 10. Amendments to provisions related to Party discipline.
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Source: *Xinhua News Agency*, (CPC Congress) Full text of resolution on Party Constitution amendment, 22 October 2022.

⁶ “(CPC Congress) Full text of resolution on Party Constitution amendment”, <https://english.news.cn/20221022/fea670f419d7426ab564a795d5737b52/c.html>, accessed 26 October 2022.

⁷ Bert Hofman, “National security eclipses economics in Xi’s new era”, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/national-security-eclipses-economics-in-xi-s-new-era>, accessed 25 October 2022.

- 1.12 During the Congress, 205 candidates were elected as members of the new CPC Central Committee and 171 as alternate members. Of the 205 Central Committee members, 114 people (56%) were new members. Only nine were born in the 1960s, while 165 members, or 80.5%, were born in the 1950s. The Party Congress also elected 133 Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission members who will be taking charge of the unabated anti-corruption campaign in Xi’s third term.
- 1.13 The 2,296 attendees at the Congress represented 96 million Party members and grass-roots Party members including workers, farmers and professionals, with a combined share of 33.6%, while the proportion of female delegates was 27%, 2.8 percentage points higher than that of the previous party congress. Minority ethnic groups and postgraduates accounted for a respective 11.5% and 52.7% of the total delegates.⁸

“Chinese Path to Modernisation” and Security Highlighted

- 2.1 In his work report that outlined his vision of “building a modern socialist China in all respects” (*quanmian jianshe shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia*),⁹ Xi highlighted the “Chinese path to modernisation” (*zhongguoshi xiandaihua*) and reiterated the Party’s adherence to reform and opening-up, self-reliance, dynamic zero-COVID policy, environmental protection, anti-corruption effort, struggle against separatism and interference, modernisation of the armed forces, and expansion of international influences (Table 4).

TABLE 4 KEY POINTS OF XI’S REPORT TO THE 20TH PARTY CONGRESS

1. The CPC’s central task is to “build China into a great modern socialist country in all respects” and to “advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts” through “a Chinese path to modernisation”.
2. By 2035, China should substantially grow its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) on a par with that of a mid-level developed country, significantly enhance national soft power, steadily lower carbon emissions after reaching a peak and comprehensively strengthen its national security capabilities.

⁸ http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-09/26/content_5712583.htm, accessed 17 October 2022.

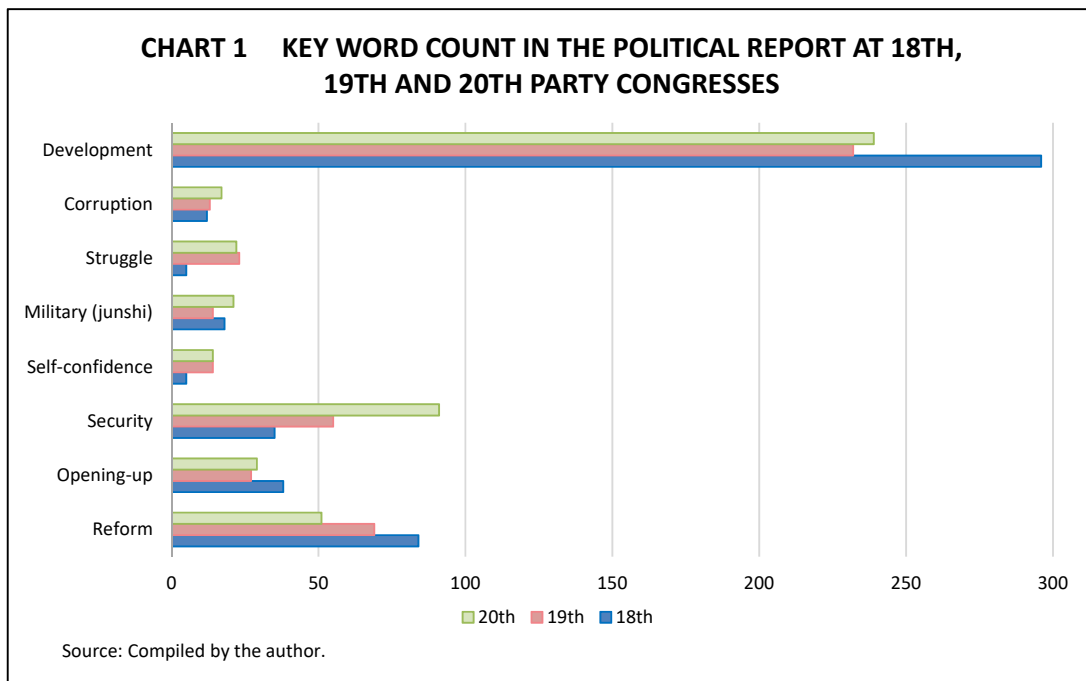
⁹ “Xi calls for building of modern socialist China in all respects as key CPC congress opens”, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-10-16/Xi-calls-for-building-of-modern-socialist-China-in-all-respects-1eaETdHmBKE/index.html>, accessed 18 October 2022.

3. China should build a “high-standard socialist market economy”, advance “whole-process people’s democracy”, implement an employment-first strategy and exercise law-based governance.
4. China’s GDP now accounts for 18.5% of the world economy, up 7.2 percentage points over the past 10 years. The world’s second largest economy has become a major trading partner for over 140 countries and regions, leading the world in total volume of trade in goods.
5. Marxism is the fundamental guiding ideology upon which the CPC and People’s Republic of China have been founded and thrive.
6. The CPC should be ready to “withstand high winds, choppy waters and even dangerous storms”. Self-revolution is “a journey to which there is no end”.
7. Anti-corruption is the most thorough self-revolution.
8. China “adheres to the right course of economic globalisation and opposes all forms of unilateralism”.
9. China will “accelerate the implementation of innovation-driven development strategies and accelerate the realisation of high-level scientific and technological self-reliance”. The country will accelerate the “construction of the world’s important talent centre” and strive to “form a comparative advantage of international competition for talents”.
10. In the face of the COVID outbreak, China has adhered to the “supremacy of the people and the supremacy of life”, implementing the dynamic zero-COVID policy.
11. In spite of separatist activities by Taiwanese independence forces and interference in Taiwan affairs by external forces, China has demonstrated strong determination and ability to “safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity and oppose Taiwan independence”. The CPC does not renounce the use of force, retaining the option to take all necessary measures.
12. China “will never seek hegemony or engage in expansionism”.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Xi’s report at the 20th Party Congress.

2.2 In the full report, Xi used the term “security” (*anquan*) 91 times, up from 19th Party Congress’ 55 times in 2017, while his use of the word “reform” declined to 51 from 69 (Chart 1). That China was in a “period of strategic opportunity” (*zhanlue jiyuqi*) was no longer mentioned, expressing the Party’s anxieties about an increasingly volatile world amid the United States’ perception of China as the preeminent threat to US primacy. Neither did he say that “peace and development remain the themes of the era”.¹⁰ Xi emphasised political security, economic, military, technological, cultural and social security.

¹⁰ The “period of strategic opportunity” and “peace and development” as the “themes of the era” were included in Xi’s political report at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 and Hu Jintao’s report at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. “Period of strategic opportunity” implied that China faced no imminent risk of major conflict and could focus more on economic growth. In the longer period of reform, party leaders had



2.3 The CPC regards China’s modernisation process as different from that of the West due to China’s huge population of 1.4 billion and its socialist goal of common prosperity instead of individual affluence.¹¹ Since China’s history, culture, demography and natural resources are different from those of the West, China’s path to socialist modernisation differs from the modernisation of the West despite both being based on highly developed productivity.

2.4 Xi’s emphasis on the “Chinese path to modernisation” indicated that there is no ready-made development mode for the CPC to directly copy or imitate, and the Party must have confidence in its own development path, theory, system and culture (four confidences). Chinese modernisation is the modernisation of a huge population, of common prosperity for all, of material and cultural-ethical advancement, of harmony between humanity and nature and of peaceful development, according to Xi.¹²

announced that “peace and development remain the themes of the era”. suggesting that the stable international environment allowed China to focus on economic development instead of war preparation.

¹¹ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202209/05/WS63153baba310fd2b29e75d9c.html>, accessed 17 October 2022.

¹² <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202210/1277280.shtml>, accessed 17 October 2022.

- 2.5 The political report puts China in a crisis mode by warning of “black swan” and “gray rhino” risks in a dangerous and unstable world, justifying that strong leadership will put security first and steer the Party through the rough seas. Xi described the country as being confronted by “drastic changes in the international landscape, especially external attempts to blackmail, contain, blockade and exert maximum pressure on China”. China has “shown a fighting spirit and a firm determination to never yield to coercive power”, he said.¹³
- 2.6 Crisis mentality, valued as a virtue in conventional Chinese wisdom and the CPC’s discourse, has been stressed by Xi in recent years. He rallied cadres to meet great “struggles” in a speech delivered at the Central Party School in September 2019. Officials were told to be prepared for all kinds of crises and challenges as there were no quick solutions to many of the problems.
- 2.7 CPC officials increasingly have to consider the potential risks that are domestic and international, and conventional (such as financial crises and military conflicts) and non-conventional (such as epidemics and climate change). These days they can lose their positions due to poor crisis management rather than an underperforming economy.
- 2.8 Xi underscored the importance of creating jobs and narrowing the wide inequality gap, as employment prospects, particularly for young Chinese people, remained bleak due to economic slowdown and strict zero-COVID policy. Xi promised that the government will improve the public service system for employment, do more to help those with difficulties in finding jobs and eliminate discrimination that undermines equal employment.

The New Central Secretariat and Central Military Commission

- 3.1 The Party Congress also unveiled the new line-ups for the CPC Central Secretariat and Central Military Commission (CMC). The Central Secretariat, which is mainly responsible for carrying out routine operations of the Politburo, is empowered by

¹³ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/president-xi-puts-china-in-crisis-mode-even-as-his-continuing-rule-is-secure>, accessed 18 October 2022.

the Politburo to make day-to-day decisions and act as a coordinator between the hierarchies of the Party, State Council (China's cabinet) and military. A Secretariat member can wield more power than a Politburo member who holds a mainly ceremonial role.

- 3.2 The Secretariat is now headed by Cai Qi, the new propaganda and ideology tsar who once held several prominent jobs in Zhejiang province when Xi was in office there. A typical example of “rocket-style promotion” in China, Cai was elevated directly to the Politburo in 2017 without first tarrying on the lower rung of the Central Committee. His colleagues in the Secretariat include Shi Taifeng, Li Ganjie, Li Shulei, Chen Wenqing, Liu Jinguo and Wang Xiaohong. Cai is a PSC member, while Shi Taifeng, Li Ganjie, Li Shulei and Chen Wenqing are Politburo members. Liu Jinguo is the deputy secretary of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, while Wang Xiaohong is the minister of public security.
- 3.3 The CMC is the supreme military decision-making body in charge of command and control of China's armed forces. After the Congress, Xi continues to lead the CMC as its chairman, flanked by two vice-chairmen, Zhang Youxia and He Weidong. Like Cai, General He was elevated to the Politburo without experience in the Central Committee. He served as commander of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Eastern Theatre Command (ETC) from 2019 to January 2022, overseeing forces from the PLA's various branches in charge of the Taiwan Strait. His promotion may indicate the PLA's operational readiness for a contingency in the Taiwan Strait.
- 3.4 Li Shangfu, Liu Zhenli, Miao Hua and Zhang Shengmin are new members of the CMC. Li, a Chinese aerospace engineer, became the director of the Equipment Development Department of the CMC in September 2017. In September 2018, Li, along with the Equipment Development Department, was sanctioned by the US government for “engaging in significant transactions with persons” under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, namely for transactions that involved “Russia's transfer to China of Su-35 combat aircraft and S-400 surface-to-air missile system-related equipment”.¹⁴

¹⁴ “US sanctions Chinese military for buying Russian weapons”, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/20/politics/russia-china-sanctions-caatsa-state-dept/index.html>, accessed 25 October 2022.

3.5 Like Zhang Youxia, Liu Zhenli also has actual combat experience in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Liu, the former commander of the PLA ground force, has been tipped to head PLA’s Joint Staff Department. The two remaining CMC members – Navy Admiral Miao Hua and General Zhang Shengmin – were re-elected, but not further promoted presumably because they are political commissars and not operational experts. Miao had been political commissar of the PLA Navy since December 2014; he replaced Zhang Yang as chief of PLA Political Work Department in August 2017. Zhang Shengmin replaced Du Jincan as secretary of the CMC’s Discipline Inspection Commission in 2017.

China’s Party Congress and the Succession Issue

4.1 Since the establishment of the CPC in 1921, the Party Congress had met irregularly till the late 1970s when Deng Xiaoping came to power and embarked on the reform and opening-up policy. Since 1982, the Party Congress has met every five years (Table 5).

4.2 The Party Congress now serves two key functions, as a formal occasion for the Party to pronounce major policy platforms and directions, and for the Party to reshuffle its Central Committee, Politburo and its Standing Committee, and other important Party organisations every five years.

TABLE 5 PARTY CONGRESSES IN THE REFORM ERA

Party Congress	Month and Year	Number of Delegates	Membership of CPC	Elected Party Leader	Political Significance
12th	Sep 1982	1,600	39.6 million	Hu Yaobang	It was the first Party Congress in the reform era which consolidated the reform and opening-up policy.
13th	Oct 1987	1,936	46 million	Zhao Ziyang	Zhao Ziyang was elected as the party secretary; he was preparing for political reforms when they had been crushed after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown.
14th	Oct 1992	1,989	51 million	Jiang Zemin	It was convened against the backdrop of Deng Xiaoping’s <i>nansun</i> (Southern Tour) that called for more aggressive reforms. The Congress formally endorsed “socialist

					market economy” as the ultimate goal of China’s economic reform. It marked the coming of age of the “Third Generation” of leadership headed by Jiang Zemin.
15th	Sep 1997	2,048	58 million	Jiang Zemin	Deng Xiaoping passed away a few months before the Congress was convened. Jiang Zemin consolidated his power at the Congress.
16th	Nov 2002	2,114	66 million	Hu Jintao	As scheduled, Hu replaced Jiang as Party general secretary, with Jiang’s “Three Represents” enshrined in the Party Constitution. It was the first orderly power transition in the Party history.
17th	Oct 2007	2,217	71 million	Hu Jintao	Hu was reelected as Party general secretary and Xi joined the Politburo Standing Committee as heir apparent. Hu’s concept of “Scientific Development” was enshrined in the Party Charter.
18th	Nov 2012	2,270	85 million	Xi Jinping	In CPC’s second orderly power succession, Xi, as scheduled, replaced Hu as CPC general secretary and chairman of the Central Military Commission.
19th	Oct 2017	2,287	89 million	Xi Jinping	Xi was reelected as CPC general secretary and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era was written into the CPC Charter.
20th	Oct 2022	2,296	96 million	Xi Jinping	Xi was reelected as CPC general secretary. The new developments in Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era since the 19th Party Congress have been incorporated into the Party Charter.

Source: Compiled by the author.

4.3 Since the 14th Party Congress of 1992, the power transition at the Party Congress had followed a fairly predictable pattern. Jiang Zemin became top leader at the 14th Party Congress (1992), consolidated his power at the 15th Party Congress (1997) before relinquishing his leadership role to Hu Jintao at the 16th Party Congress (2002). Similarly, Hu Jintao became the top leader at the 16th Party Congress (2002),

re-elected at the 17th Party Congress (2007) and handed over his power to Xi Jinping at the 18th Party Congress (2012).

- 4.4 Neither the 19th nor the 20th Party Congress installed an heir apparent in the PSC. Such a succession void may increase uncertainties for future power transitions — an issue that is central to the power play that guides Chinese elite politics. The absence of a designated successor has added uncertainty to the CPC’s succession issue.¹⁵
- 4.5 There is hence a need for Xi to use his personal authority to eventually set up a “new normal” for the selection of his successor. It would not necessarily be a smooth process and might be challenged by intense intra-party competition.

Taiwan, Hong Kong Issue and Foreign Affairs

- 5.1 The Party Congress added “opposing and containing Taiwan independence” to the Party Charter, the first time such an explicit reference has been included in the document to address tensions concerning the island. Xi broke little new ground on the question of Taiwan but struck a sharper tone. He warned against foreign interference and separatism in Taiwan, asserting that China will never promise to renounce the use of force. The focus on external forces signalled growing recognition by China that Taiwan has become more of a priority for the United States, as well as for an increasing number of countries around the world.
- 5.2 Xi gave the issue of Taiwan greater prominence in his recent speech than he did five years ago at the 19th Party Congress. He won the loudest and longest applause from the nearly 2,300 delegates after proclaiming that “complete reunification” of China must be realised.

¹⁵ The issue of successions has affected the country’s political stability since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. In particular, power succession in the 1980s did not go smoothly, as evidenced by the ousting of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, leaders who were seen by the party orthodoxy as being too politically liberal in the face of a rising tide of student protests. Since then, the party leadership has made enormous efforts to institutionalise elite politics. Many formal institutions have been established, but informal rules continue to play a role in handling power succession.

- 5.3 On Hong Kong and Macau issues, Xi claimed that the “one country, two systems” principle in the two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) has been a great success. He said China has achieved comprehensive control of Hong Kong, turning it from chaos to governance. He promised that the capitalist system and lifestyle in Hong Kong and Macau will remain unchanged for a long time.
- 5.4 Xi reiterated that patriotism must be strengthened among the people of Hong Kong and Macau for them to share a strong sense of national identity with their peers in the Mainland. He reinforced that the governing principle of “one country, two systems” will not be changed or distorted.
- 5.5 Warning of continued uncertainties in the global landscape, he urged party cadres to foster a fighting spirit so that they “cannot be swayed by fallacies, deterred by intimidation or cowed by pressure”. The report stated that “external attempts to suppress and contain China may escalate at any time”.¹⁶
- 5.6 Xi spoke against hegemonism, power politics, the Cold War mentality, interference in other countries’ internal affairs and double standards on the international stage. “No matter what stage of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansionism”, he promised.

What is at Stake for Politics and Policies?

- 6.1 Conceivably, the CPC will not totally dismantle its collective leadership model at the top despite Xi’s ever-growing power at the 20th Party Congress. While Xi may have acquired more power than what his predecessors had attained as 'first-among-equals', he has not been designated to positions like the chairman of the CPC at the Party Congress. He still needs to share power with other members, even if they had been loyal to him before joining the PSC.
- 6.2 While the party will continue to exercise its strict ideological control after the Congress, the crackdown on businesses may take a back seat temporarily to urgently

¹⁶ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinas-xi-jinping-to-open-20th-communist-party-congress>, accessed 17 October 2022.

boost and stimulate a sagging economy. Some restrictions on the property, financial and tech sectors may be relaxed.

- 6.3 Although there are few signs to suggest that China will ease its draconian zero-COVID policy soon, the conclusion of the Party Congress has boosted the confidence of the leadership in cross-border travel. Xi and his colleagues are likely to travel overseas more often to seek international influence, while lower-level visits to other countries may gradually resume after the lineup of the State Council, China's cabinet, has been approved by the annual NPC session in March 2023.
- 6.4 Xi's signature diplomatic strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), will continue as planned. However, in recent years, the emphasis is on the improvement of people's livelihoods rather than on the scale of infrastructure projects in participating countries.
- 6.5 Xi himself has highlighted issues like climate change, sustainable development and digital connectivity along the Belt and Road. New slogans such as "green silk road" and "digital silk road" will likely emerge for the promotion of the BRI after the party congress.
- 6.6 Despite Xi's unprecedented power gain, whether the "road" ahead for China is green, silky or digital is uncertain as its once-institutionalised politics and economy have entered uncharted waters.
- 6.7 In September 2022, the CPC published new regulations on the promotion and demotion of leading party cadres, which removed the mandatory retirement ages and term limits for the appointment of senior officials. A new set of promotion criteria is in play to reshape the leadership team and avoid disruptive power struggles in the following apparent order of priority — loyalty to Xi, performance, technocratic background and age.
- 6.8 Nevertheless, the new rules may make future leadership reshuffling less predictable, while the unabated anti-corruption campaign in the name of "self-revolution" may paralyse millions of bureaucrats into risk aversion and dampen their enthusiasm for

economic growth, a scenario that Xi could ill-afford in his third term. If officials opt for “lying flat” — or *tangping* — it could send China’s development drive into a state of stupor.

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Best regards,
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