



30 November 2025

CCP CC'S FOURTH PLENUM CONFIRMED XI JINPING'S GRIP ON THE PARTY AND PLA

by JAYADEVA RANADE

The 3-day (October 20-23) Fourth Plenum of the 20th Central Committee (CC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which concluded in Beijing on the morning of October 23 with a 5,000-word communique, unequivocally confirmed Xi Jinping's pre-eminent position in the CCP and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It approved his personnel appointments, dismissals of senior PLA officers and endorsed his economic policies and the hi-technology focussed Fifteenth Five Year Plan. Xi Jinping's imprimatur on the Plan, which will guide national economic policy till 2030, was affirmed by his chairing the committee which drafted the Plan and also his authoring the "explanation" of the 15th Five-Year Plan, which was duly published by China's official media. Signalling approval of Xi Jinping's leadership and policies, each of the six other Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) members, including the Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Hu Chunhua, published signed commentaries endorsing the Fifteenth Five Year Plan.

2. The Fourth Plenum approved, ex-post facto, the expulsion of nine senior PLA officers, including General He Weidong who was Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) as well as a member of the Politburo and General Miao Hua, who was a CMC member and in charge of the CMC's Political Work Department. It approved the appointment of General Zhang Shengmin as Vice Chairman of the CMC in place of He Weidong. General Zhang Youxia continues as the first Vice Chairman of the CMC. With the expulsion of He Weidong and elevation of Zhang Shengmin the CMC now comprises four members all closely aligned with Xi Jinping. Additionally, the Plenum expelled ten members of the CCP Central Committee further reducing the membership of the 20th CCP CC to 168 Full Members and 147 Alternate Members from the initial 205 Full members and 171 Alternates Members.

3. The appointments effected at this Plenum and drastic reduction in the PLA's representation in the CCP CC, reflect that Xi Jinping will continue to focus on the PLA and more dismissals of senior PLA officers is expected. It is likely that senior PLA officers are being subjected to further vetting for loyalty and political reliability. Pertinent is that of the eleven alternate members of the CCP CC who were elevated as Full CC members to replace the nine expelled CCP CC members, none were from the PLA. Full and alternate members of the PLA in the Central Committee now number only 12, against the 67 members who originally represented the PLA in the 20th CCP CC in 2022. Pointedly, Xi Jinping did not appoint Zheng Shengmin to the CCP CC Politburo to fill the vacancy created by He Weidong's expulsion from the CCP and PLA, thus visibly reducing the PLA's representation in the second highest body of the CCP by half. Also interesting was that Fang Yongxiang, Director of the CMC General Office, who would have been working closely with Xi

Jinping in the CMC, was among the alternate members representing the PLA who were not promoted.

4. Plenary meetings are important events on the CCP's annual calendar. Of the seven plenums convened by the CCP CC between Party Congresses, the Fourth Plenum traditionally deals with institutional and governance issues, but the adverse international environment ensured that economic and personnel issues dominated this Plenum. The CCP CC's Fourth Plenum held in Beijing was particularly important at this juncture when China faces severe economic pressures, trade frictions, rising cost of living, high unemployment and pressure from the US. Other than the official explanation that delays in drafting the Fifteenth Five Year Plan had delayed convening of the Fourth Party Plenum, other factors too appear to have contributed to the delay. The announcement of the dismissal of the nine high ranking PLA Generals by China's Ministry of National Defence just three days prior to start of the Fourth Plenum and need for its formal ratification by the Plenum would be one. Ten members of the CC were also dismissed. It was interesting that Chinese President Xi Jinping appointed at least two provincial Party Secretaries and two Governors just a couple of months before the Plenum. The Plenum approved the 15th Five Year Plan (2026-2030) thus ensuring that Xi Jinping's economic policies will endure well after the next Party Congress scheduled to be held in 2027.

5. Work on the Fifteenth Five Year Plan (2026-2030), which is being interpreted by Chinese officials and scholars as a particularly crucial Plan to realise and consolidate China's foundation, started quite some time ago with China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) presenting a preliminary study on December 17 and 18, 2023. During an inspection tour to Shanghai in April 2025, Xi Jinping presided over a symposium on China's economic and social development in the 15th Five-Year Plan period. While stressing the need to adapt to the changing global landscape and grasp strategic priorities for China's development, he said "We must unswervingly manage our own affairs well, and stay committed to expanding high-standard opening-up". He said "Greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring both development and security, with a comprehensive assessment of domestic and external risks and challenges". Experts say that during the 15th Five-Year Plan period, China's development priorities are likely to be centered around enhancing its economic resilience, which will include diversifying trading partners, boosting domestic consumption and improving technology and innovation capabilities. The Plan emphasises making all-out efforts for basically realising socialist modernization. It prioritises hi-technology and scientific innovation, high-quality development etc, all essential for realising China's goal of surpassing the US by 2049.

6. The stage for discussion of the Plan was set by a series of articles on the economy published in the major official newspapers namely, the People's Daily, Guangming Daily, Worker's Daily and Economic Daily. The People's Daily, for example, published a series of 8 articles from September 30 to early October under the by-line 'Zhong Caiwen' -- indicating their importance. Zhong Caiwen is a pseudonym used by the People's Daily and Xinhua and is shorthand for articles authored by the CCP CC's Central Financial Economics Committee. The articles covered a range of subjects and were titled: (i) From a global perspective: China's leap and transformation in the new era; (ii) Deeply understanding the internal logic of China's long-term stable development; (iii) Viewing China's current economic situation with scientific objectivity; (iv) Major opportunities in China's economic transformation and upgrading; (v) Fully recognizing and grasping the certainty in China's high-quality development; (vi) China as a model of inclusive

global development; (vii) China's economic development is open and win-win; and (viii) Deep understanding of China leads to firm belief in China. About a week earlier the Economic Daily (Jingji Ribao; October 16) published an article stressing the importance of boosting domestic consumption titled 'Coordinate efforts to boost consumption'. Emphasising that "Final consumption is a lasting driver of economic growth", it added "The role of consumption as the main engine driving economic growth has become increasingly prominent, and significant results have been achieved in expanding domestic demand and boosting consumption". It reiterated "The fundamental role of consumption in economic growth is becoming increasingly prominent".

7. A two-part Xinhua Commentary published on October 14 and 15 confirmed Xi Jinping's leadership in drafting the Fifteenth Five Year Plan. Titled "Adhering to the Party's overall leadership provides a fundamental guarantee for achieving high-quality development — Commentary on the Practice and Enlightenment of Economic and Social Development during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period", the commentary insisted that "High-quality development is the primary task in building a modern socialist country in an all-round way". High quality development was first articulated by Xi Jinping at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 and means shifting the growth model from crude to intensive, with a focus on innovation. It would no longer be mainly driven by traditional factors such as labour, capital and land but by new innovative factors such as information technology, big data and artificial intelligence. High-quality development aims to achieve greater efficiency, equity, sustainability and security. The commentary asserted that "Upholding the Party's overall leadership provides the fundamental guarantee for achieving high-quality development". It quoted Xi Jinping as pointing out: "Whether we can manage the world's second largest economy well and maintain sustained and healthy economic and social development fundamentally depends on how well the Party plays its core leadership role in economic and social development." Affirming Xi Jinping's leadership, the commentary said "The Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has taken overall charge of the situation, set the direction, and led China's economic and social development forward."

8. Despite persistent rumours circulating since last year that Xi Jinping's authority has been diluted and his position has weakened, Xi Jinping visibly demonstrated his authority and pre-eminent position in the CCP and PLA at the CCP CC's Fourth Plenum. The sharp reduction in PLA representation in the CCP CC was a bold move. There has been no indication of his authority having been weakened and the anti-corruption campaign initiated by him continues with no lessening of vigour.

(The author is President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy.)