

EXPERT'S INSIGHTS

Landmark Plenum Upholds China's Modernisation

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Abstract

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), held in Beijing from October 20–23, 2025, reviewed the achievements of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) and set forth the Recommendations for the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). The Plenum reaffirmed policy continuity grounded in Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, emphasising high-quality development, technological self-reliance, and national rejuvenation. It outlined priorities for industrial modernisation, scientific innovation, and infrastructure expansion, alongside rural revitalisation and coordinated regional development. The Communiqué and Recommendations also stressed environmental sustainability, domestic demand stimulation, and social equity, including healthcare, education, and demographic measures. Anti-corruption initiatives and Party self-reform were highlighted as essential to maintaining governance stability and advancing the modernisation agenda. The Plenum further reinforced openness and global engagement, while addressing strategic challenges in international relations and national security. Overall, the session signals a comprehensive strategy for China's socialist modernisation, combining economic growth, technological advancement, social development, and international cooperation over the next decade.

Keywords: China, Communist Party of China, Chinese economic development, global engagement of China

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The 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held its long-anticipated Fourth Plenary Session in Beijing on October 20–23, 2025. The Plenum was attended by 168 of the CC's full members and 147 alternate members of the Central Committee, as well as members of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and other senior officials in a non-voting capacity. This session marks a pivotal moment in China's unparalleled policy planning process, having reviewed the near-completion of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) and deliberated the Recommendations for the Formulation of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). As usual, the main report was presented by the country's paramount leader, Xi Jinping. The 5,000-character Communiqué of the Plenary Session was released on October 23 and was further elaborated during a Press Conference on October 24, featuring interventions from six high-ranking Party and government officials,² along with the Explanation of the Recommendations by Xi Jinping, published in the CPC bimonthly journal *Qiushi*.

The Plenum demonstrates steady policy continuity, guided by the theories of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and most importantly, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, which incorporates the concept of 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. Continuity may be traced in prioritising 'high-quality development' and 'scientific and technological self-reliance'. At the same time, a counterpoint to continuity also emerged at the Plenum: it revealed the extensive personnel changes that had occurred due to corruption investigations across the Party and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The Central Committee gave a positive assessment of China's major achievements during the 14th Five-Year Plan 'in the face of a complicated international landscape and challenging domestic tasks'. China has staged a resilient post-pandemic recovery to maintain GDP growth of around 5 percent³ despite global headwinds, and has reached 'new heights in terms of economic strength, scientific and technological capabilities, and composite national strength'. It has been expanding the world's largest high-speed rail network and exerting leadership in renewable energy production. The confidence in meeting the Plan's objectives is based on tangible evidence: industrial upgrading, technological self-reliance, and social stability advancing hand-in-hand. Long-term growth has been facilitated by the philosophy of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', as well as the country's enormous market, complete industrial system, and abundant human resources.

The Plenum is viewed as a landmark event in the country's political cycle to meet the 2035 target, set forth by the 20th National CPC Congress (October 2022), of 'basically achieving socialist modernisation', which is perceived as the first stage on the way towards the 'Second Centenary Goal of building China into a great modern socialist country', scheduled to be accomplished by 2049 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the

² The six high-ranking officials were Jiang Jinquan, Director, Policy Research Office of the CPC Central Committee; Han Wenxiu, Executive Deputy Director, Office of the CC for Financial and Economic Affairs; Zhen Shanjie, Head, National Development and Reform Commission; Yin Hejun, Minister of Science and Technology; Wang Wentao, Minister of Commerce; and Li Haichao, Head, National Health Commission

³ The nominal GDP in 2025 is expected to reach the figure of 140 trln. yuan, or nearly 20 trln. US dollars.

People's Republic. By the year 2035, China's economic strength, scientific and technological capabilities, national defence capabilities, composite national strength, and international influence are envisioned to become markedly stronger. Per capita GDP is scheduled to be on a par with that of a mid-level developed country, reaching 20,000 US dollars, which requires maintaining a sufficient annual growth rate of at least 4.5 %.⁴

The Recommendations for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, as the chief deliverable of the Plenum, are a product of a 10-month process led by a drafting team under the auspices of the Political Bureau's Standing Committee,⁵ which has started last January and has then conducted a wide-range lucrative work of soliciting opinions and organising discussions.⁶ The document offers key benchmarks for understanding the logic of China's development and anticipating its future trajectory. The Plenum broadly signalled the Party's continuing use of the same economic instruments outlined at the Third CC Plenum (July 2024) and in the 14th Plan to achieve its objectives.

The overarching notion of advancing modernisation looms large in the Communiqué and the Recommendations. In the first place, it pertains to industry, given its central role in strengthening the foundations of the real economy. The Communiqué uses stronger language than previous economic documents to underline reliance on advanced manufacturing as the backbone of China's modernisation drive and an anchor of national resilience. Noteworthy is the pledge to keep its share at an appropriate level, unlike many economies that have hollowed out their industrial bases. On the contrary, China is adamant to remain the world's factory in established sectors and 'to build a modern industrial system', based on increased self-reliance. Leader Xi Jinping has pointedly cautioned against the temptation to shift China's economy 'from the real to the virtual', which has emerged due to the country's undisputed success in the development of high technologies. The Press Conference, which served as an interpretation briefing conducted after the Plenum, listed a number of key aspects of industrial modernisation. One of them concerns traditional industries as the underlying basis of the manufacturing sector: they have to be modernised to maintain 'competitiveness in the global division of labour'. Other aspects stipulate 'seizing the commanding heights' of emerging and future industries, accounting for more than 18% of GDP, as new growth drivers. Of utmost importance is the task to achieve 'decisive breakthroughs' in key core technologies by 'adopting extraordinary measures'.⁷

⁴ The nominal GDP is projected to double in 2035 compared to 2020.

⁵ The team was headed by President Xi Jinping, while Premier Li Qiang, Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee Wang Huning, Director of the CPC General Office Cai Qi, and Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang served as deputy chiefs. The group also included heads of relevant departments and localities.

⁶ More than 3.1 mln. comments were received, which were then sorted through and condensed into over 1,500 suggestions. As a result, the draft was amended by 218 additions, revisions and simplifications.

⁷ Priority sectors in the four categories include: A) Traditional industries – mining, metallurgy, chemicals, light industry, textiles, machinery, ship building, construction; B) Emerging industries – new energy, new materials, aerospace, low-altitude economy; C) Future industries – quantum technology, bio-manufacturing, hydrogen energy, nuclear fusion energy, brain-computer interfaces, embodied intelligence, 6G mobile communications; D) Key core technologies for decisive breakthrough – integrated circuits, industrial machine tools, high-end instruments, foundational software, advanced materials.

Recent headways in commercial space launches, electric vehicles, and high-end robotics present good examples to follow. The Plenum designated for the first time the space sector as a top priority, pledging to turn China into a leading spacefaring nation over the next five years. It also promised cutting-edge development of nuclear fusion and other high-tech industries. Quite relevant is the strife to further modernise infrastructure, keeping in mind that China is home to the world's largest network of high-speed railway, express highways, ports, postal delivery, electricity, and broadband connection.

The modernisation drive also centres on agriculture and rural areas, aiming to enhance overall production capacity and improve output quality. Rural policies are closely connected with poverty alleviation, where China's performance has been exemplary: the elimination of absolute poverty – a task accomplished after the 18th CPC Congress (November 2012) – has been widely recognised as a tremendous success. The period of the 14th Five-Year Plan was envisaged as transitional from poverty alleviation to all-round rural revitalisation, which plays a crucial role in building a beautiful and harmonious countryside. Rural areas have been turned into a frontier of modernisation through the promotion of digital agriculture, green agriculture, technological innovation, improved education, and better infrastructure. The declared purposes are: raising farmers' income, basically securing modern living conditions in rural areas, and providing better services. Good practices of collaboration among Eastern and Western provinces and regularised government support will be applied with the necessary adjustments to prevent relapse into poverty in underdeveloped regions, especially in the Western part of the country.⁸

Highly essential for refining the distribution of productive forces is the coordination of major regional strategies, ensuring that key regions play their role as growth poles, leveraging their complementary strengths. The Plenum has opted to upgrade the regional development landscape by setting up four major blocs (Eastern, Central, Western, and North-Western) and three major driving forces (the Beijing-Hebei-Tianjin urban agglomeration, the Yangtze River Delta, and the Hong Kong-Guangdong-Macao Bay area). An important part of the decisions focuses on strengthening the marine economy,⁹ including the utilisation and protection of marine resources and the maritime environment. Coordinated regional development figured prominently in Xi's warning at the July 2025 Politburo meeting against 'every province developing industries' in artificial intelligence and other emerging sectors. Pledges to reduce provincial protectionism and promote corporate self-discipline will have to confront the uphill task of overcoming incentives that drive regional governments to back local champions and firms in the chase of market share. Concerns about overproduction and ruinous price wars have given rise to the newly coined and already controversial term 'involution', reflecting the exhaustion and degradation of companies in the struggle for survival, which eats away at their resources for R&D investment and turns economic

⁸ The government has identified 160 key support-recipient counties for rural revitalisation and provincial authorities have also designated their own priority recipients.

⁹ The value of the marine industry is over 10 trln. yuan.

competition into a form of self-destruction. The CPC will certainly have to offer solutions to this pressing issue in the years to come.

The notion of 'new quality productive forces', introduced by Xi a few years ago, is closely connected with breakthrough development in science and technology. In view of complex global changes and strategic competition, China is vying for a leading position and greater self-reliance without succumbing to the negative trend of isolation. Beijing has become a key player in the global race for dominance in artificial intelligence, with its now 4,500 companies in the sector. China has significantly increased tech investment,¹⁰ with AI emerging as a major area of focus and a powerhouse of economic and social development, being deeply integrated in manufacturing, finance, health care, and other sectors.¹¹ Apart from that, there is a clear recognition of the need for stronger regulations, laws, and ethical standards, as well as for international cooperation, designed to establish a global AI governance system and make AI 'an international public good that benefits all'.

Technological revolution is advanced in synergy with promoting talent through educational reform and 'strengthening original innovation' – a formulation that may be assessed as a safeguard against attempts to deprive China of access to high technologies. Innovation is not confined to laboratories but should be diffused across society and industries. A crucial innovation driver is the Digital China Initiative, aiming at the creation of an integrated digital market; it has already transformed once-traditional sectors like agriculture and logistics into engines of data-driven efficiency. Industrial innovation can deliver the productivity boost China needs to steer growth amid debt, demographic, and diplomatic headwinds.

The field of environment also figures prominently in CPC priorities, aligning with China's aspiration for global leadership in green development. The Plenum recommends moving faster in developing a new energy system and accelerating the shift to eco-friendly production practices and lifestyles.¹² The maxim that 'lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets' now functions as an economic policy driver and provides key elements for the Initiative to Build a Beautiful China. The critical battle against pollution needs renewed impetus. The implementation of Beijing's goals of achieving peak carbon emissions and carbon neutrality will be facilitated by a plan to introduce a dual system limiting both the aggregate amount and the intensity of carbon emissions. The imperative of generating more clean energy is addressed by both increasing the share of renewable sources¹³ and ensuring the clean and efficient use of fossil fuels. China's rapid rise as the world's largest producer of solar panels, wind turbines, and electric vehicles exemplifies the

¹⁰ R&D investment in 2024 exceeded 3.6 trln. yuan. In terms of the number of papers published in leading scientific editions China has ranked first in the course of five consecutive years.

¹¹ AI's integration with socio-economic development has given birth to the concept of 'AI plus action'.

¹² China has established the largest carbon emission trading market and clean energy supply system, and has contributed a quarter of the world's new green coverage; forests now make up for 25% of the country's total area.

¹³ Those include wind and solar power in the North-West, hydro-power in the South-West, wind power on the sea and nuclear power on the coast.

alignment of ecological awareness with industrial competitiveness. Important components of environment-friendly policies include upgrading ecosystems, boosting low-carbon and green industries¹⁴ through the construction of approximately 100 national zero-carbon industrial parks, de-carbonising most problematic industries (steel, non-ferrous metals, chemicals, and petrochemicals), reducing CO2 emissions by 400 million tonnes, and limiting solid waste to 4.5 billion tonnes.

The burgeoning growth modelled by economic modernisation, innovation, and eco-friendly production practices would be incomplete if it neglects the demand side, which remains a critical challenge. Well aware of that nexus, the CPC Central Committee pays utmost attention to consumption in pursuance of achieving the long-cherished goal, duly emphasised by the July 2024 Third Plenum, to make it the primary driver of economic growth, reducing reliance on traditional supply-side investments. To that end, there is an important change in language, stating first that ‘demand drives new supply’ ahead of ‘supply drives new demand’, marking a departure from the supply-side approach, which has done little to boost consumer spending. Domestic demand is regarded as a factor in fostering innovation and ‘positive interactions between consumption and investment’, rather than a tool for promoting a consumerist economy. An article in the party journal *Qiushi*’s August 2025 edition explained this concept as a response to growing ‘high-quality demand’ among Chinese consumers, particularly new demands driven by younger generations.¹⁵ The repeated emphasis on domestic consumption in reference to building a strong domestic market signals a stronger policy focus compared to previous plenums. The intentions to ‘vigorously boost consumption’ will, however, have to be specified with carefully calibrated policies.

To raise household consumption, the country will need a robust domestic market, which in the Chinese context translates into developing a ‘high-standard socialist market economy’. The latter implies refining the macroeconomic governance system, including institutions and mechanisms for market-based allocation of production factors. While the huge population is a significant advantage, which has to be harnessed, local protectionism remains an acute challenge and may need to be tempered through centralised policy measures. Another aspect is the reform of China’s market access list by reducing the number of restricted fields for both foreign and domestic private investment,¹⁶ as part of the plan to develop a unified national market. Specific attention is paid to the real estate sector, which has been facing substantial difficulties, with explicit tasks set to facilitate its high-quality development.

On the other hand, consumer spending, especially in areas such as health, culture, and green products, goes hand in hand with improving living standards, investing in human

¹⁴ China’s low-carbon and green industry is estimated at 11 trln. yuan, with the prospect to at least double in the next five years.

¹⁵ One example was the 2019 animated film *Nezha*, which raised huge interest among young people, thus driving a surge in supply for China’s ‘IP Economy’.

¹⁶ As announced at the Press Conference, the number of restricted fields is proposed to be reduced from 328 to 106.

capital, and promoting common prosperity. This development philosophy ensures that the fruits of economic and social progress are shared by the majority of the population, effectively avoiding wealth polarisation and social fragmentation and laying a solid foundation for long-term social stability and harmony. The success of these endeavours is visible in the booming services sector and high-tech industries,¹⁷ which now account for the bulk of China's GDP. China's middle class continues to rise in number and is expected to reach 800 million people by 2030.

The consistent emphasis on improving the people's well-being and living standards naturally flows into a wider discourse on social policy. The scope of activities includes providing unimpeded channels of social mobility, ensuring high-quality and full employment,¹⁸ refining income distribution and social security systems, and promoting education that meets public expectations. China's medical system, which has the largest coverage in the world, deserves praise for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and for having significantly increased life expectancy.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it remains 'unevenly distributed' and requires improvement, with specific attention to chronic diseases, diagnosis, and prevention. The Healthy China Initiative, launched at the 20th CPC Congress with a timeframe until 2035, advocates a coordinated approach to health, economy, and society, and is an important prerequisite for promoting health-centred population development. Equitable access to basic public services, which meet essential needs, is also a priority. The CPC will further address demographic challenges stemming from the low birth rate and ageing population. While setting forth the target of building a 'birth-friendly society', the Party has pledged to improve elderly care, make childcare, maternal care, and education more accessible, and gradually increase retirement age in a calibrated manner, tapping into the so-called 'silver economy' of the older demographic.

Cultural creativity receives proper attention, reflecting the broader understanding that modernisation is not purely material. The target to develop a 'thriving socialist culture with Chinese characteristics for the new era' builds not only on Marxist ideology but also on the rich heritage of Chinese culture and trends in information technology. Cultural values should be powerful enough to guide, unite, and inspire people, and also to enhance the global appeal of Chinese civilisation. The continuous international recognition of Chinese filmmakers, artists, architects, and designers serves as an important vehicle of national soft power.

Yet another salient theme that emerges from the Communiqué and the Recommendations is openness, rooted in a long-standing Chinese strategy initiated nearly half a century ago. China fully recognises that its development is inseparable from that of the world, and commits to high-standard opening-up, creating new horizons for mutually beneficial cooperation,

¹⁷ China has 500,000 high-tech companies and 26 of the 100 top innovation clusters in the world, as mentioned at the Press Conference.

¹⁸ Over 12 mln. jobs are created in the country annually.

¹⁹ Life expectancy was raised to 79 years in 2024 and is scheduled to be extended to 80 years during the 15th Plan

safeguarding the multilateral trading system, and promoting broader international economic flows.²⁰ For example, foreign automobile producers enjoy national treatment and hold one third of the Chinese market. The Communiqué favours globalisation while countering strong trends of protectionism and unilateralism. Bold initiatives for opening-up are envisaged in the services and digital sectors,²¹ as well as pledges to facilitate the WTO system, regional integration, bilateral agreements, and cross-border trade. China's high-profile Belt and Road Initiative is well positioned to create greater space for investment cooperation,²² providing opportunities for shared growth, as visible in connectivity projects ranging from solar parks in the Middle East to cross-border e-commerce corridors in Southeast Asia. The implementation of those projects, although some of them have faced criticism regarding financial, social, or environmental sustainability, underscores that China's modernisation is a cooperative process that enhances global economic vitality. China's extroverted policy orientation carries great significance amid the resurgence of protectionist tendencies and provides a resolute response to calls for 'decoupling' and 'breaking supply chains'.

Openness is rigorously challenged by a 'complex and severe' international environment, prompting China to contend for 'winning the strategic initiative amid fierce international competition' and to make sure that no foreign power impedes its economic development. Creating a new development pattern is intended to stabilise the domestic economy as a hedge against international uncertainties. A major irritant, not treated in the Communiqué but mentioned by the Minister of Commerce at the Press Conference,²³ is the confrontation and quest for 'decoupling' with the United States, whose importance cannot be underestimated against the backdrop of the CPC's concept that 'major-power relations shape the international situation, and the evolution of the international situation profoundly influences domestic development'. It may be recalled that last April the Fourth Plenum's drafting group convened a special meeting to adjust the Party's five-year-plan proposals following the escalation of tariffs on Chinese imports announced by President Trump. Consequently, the Xi-Trump meeting in Busan on October 30 – their first face-to-face encounter in six years – was widely interpreted as connected with the Plenum. The tone at the Busan meeting was conciliatory, consistent with the Chinese saying that 'within

²⁰ China has been leading the world in trading goods for the last 8 years and the volume of its trade in services exceeded 1 trln. US dollars in 2024. In the same year China was the biggest trading partner for over 150 countries and regions.

²¹ Pilot programmes will start in telecommunications, bio-technology and hospitals; wide opening-up is envisaged in culture and education.

²² China has attracted huge foreign investments in its economy, assessed at about 720 bln US dollars in cumulative terms, but the flows have been slowed down recently. As to outbound capital flows, China comes third in the world with its investments having been translated into tax payments in recipient countries to the tune of 300 bln US dollars.

²³ Minister Wang Wentao praised the four rounds of China-US economic and trade consultations and appealed for dialogue and cooperation as the only way to address mutual concerns, while opposing the option of 'de-coupling' and disrupting supply chains. Xi reaffirmed that the Party must 'adhere to economic development as the central task' – a phrase he had not used to describe current priorities since the 20th CPC Congress.

crises lie opportunities'. Both sides made compromises,²⁴ providing some breathing space to stabilise their mutual relationship without ending competition in the political, ideological, commercial, and technological fields. The full restoration of normal bilateral relations will require sustained and systematic effort.

The Plenum leaves no doubt about efforts to establish a sound and modern national security system and enhance public safety. Here one can trace certain modifications of previous theoretical concepts of China's 'peaceful rise' (later 'peaceful development'), reflecting judgments about a fragile international environment. Yet Xi Jinping's opening speech at the Plenum pays tribute to China's distinctive development logic of pursuing progress while reinforcing stability, showing a clear preference for economic growth²⁵ over national security. Both goals are pursued through a holistic approach and a socialist path of social governance with Chinese characteristics, ensuring that society remains both dynamic and orderly. The Peaceful China Initiative²⁶ is to be elevated to a higher level.

For certain, the maintenance of national security requires the decisive contribution of the armed forces. The People's Liberation Army, which will turn 100 years old in 2027, is undergoing a modernisation process aimed at achieving carefully defined national defence centenary goals. According to the military strategy for the new era, based on the Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military, the CPC is duty-bound to exercise absolute leadership over the armed forces, with ultimate responsibility resting with the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. This time-tested principle, established since the PLA's inception as the CPC's creation way before the Party's coming to power, singles out political loyalty as a pivot of the integrated modernisation strategy. The latter envisages reform based on scientific and technological advances (mechanisation, informatisation, application of smart technologies, and modernisation of military governance) and personnel training (operations, combat preparedness, and capability enhancement). The Communiqué's emphasis on adherence to law, discipline, anti-corruption measures, and centralised coordination shores up the institutional backbone that enables long-term policy consistency.

The CPC's intense anti-corruption campaign, ongoing for more than a decade, peaked at the Fourth Plenary Session with several key personnel changes. The Plenum confirmed a record number of 14 expulsions from the Party of high-ranking military and civilian

²⁴ China agreed to purchase agricultural goods and oil and gas from Alaska; to cooperate on ending fentanyl trade; to finalize a deal on TikTok; to suspend for a year the export licensing regime for rare-earth minerals. The US agreed to cut the 20% fentanyl-related tariff by half; to suspend investigations into semiconductors, logistics, and shipbuilding; to take steps to allow Chinese investment in the United States; to delay restrictions to shipments from Chinese companies with 50% or greater ownership by blacklisted entities. Both sides agreed to pause for one year newly introduced port fees on ships linked to the other side.

²⁵ Xi reaffirmed that the Party must 'adhere to economic development as the central task' – a phrase he had not used to describe current priorities since the 20th CPC Congress.

²⁶ A domestic policy initiative focused on achieving and maintaining long-term social stability and security within China through improved social governance, risk prevention, and enhancing the well-being of citizens.

officials (ten full and four alternate CC members) for ‘grave violations of party discipline and state laws’. These measures followed reports by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection involving five civilian officials²⁷ and by the Central Military Commission’s Discipline Inspection Commission involving nine PLA officials. Among the latter are Political Bureau member He Weidong, also Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission – a role shared by two people second only to Xi Jinping himself in terms of military oversight – and Political Work Department director Miao Hua, another CMC member.²⁸ While the violations were not specified, some observations suggest they may be connected with private-sector involvement in military industries, which has been encouraged in recent years and has given rise to unhealthy personal interests.

Eleven alternates were promoted²⁹ to replace the ten expelled Central Committee members plus one who died last year. None of these promotions came from the PLA, possibly indicating further upcoming replacements within the military. One general, however, saw his fortunes rise: the military’s anti-corruption chief, Zhang Shengmin, longtime secretary of the CMC Commission for Discipline Inspection, was added to the Central Military Commission as Vice-Chairman,³⁰ replacing He Weidong and signalling that the anti-corruption drive has ‘no finish line’. Notably, however, the Plenum did not elevate Zhang to the Politburo, suggesting that refreshment of the Politburo and CMC may not occur until the 21st Party Congress in late 2027, allowing time to select capable candidates for the anticipated generational reshuffle.

The roll call of attendees, recording the lowest figure since Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 (168 out of 205 original full CC members and 147 out of 171 alternates), has drawn significant attention. Especially notable was the low turnout of PLA generals – only 22 of 33 CC members. Many commanders and senior officials in key positions were absent, likely due to dismissal or investigation. The high number of military absences and expulsions suggests an ongoing effort to transform the military and consolidate Party control. It remains to be seen whether Zhang will retain or relinquish his role as PLA discipline chief; his would-be successor will have to face the challenge of sustaining the anti-corruption campaign.

The success of the campaign is closely linked to the CPC’s capability to provide political leadership and theoretical guidance for fulfilling the 15th Five-Year Plan and advancing Chinese modernisation, socialist democracy, and rule of law. ‘To run the country well, we must first run the Party well,’ states the Communiqué – a principle accompanied by the task to implement self-reform and rigorous Party self-governance. This follows the concept

²⁷ Tang Renjian, Jin Xiangjun, Li Shisong, Yang Fasen, and Zhu Zhisong.

²⁸ The other seven officials are generals He Hongjun, Wang Xiubin, Lin Xiangyang, Qin Shutong, Yuan Huazhi, Wang Chunling, and Zhang Fengzhong.

²⁹ Yu Huiwen, Ma Hancheng, Wang Jian, Wang Xi, Wang Yonghong, Wang Tingkai, Wang Xinwei, Wei Tao, Deng Yiwu, Deng Xiuming, and Lu Hong.

³⁰ Now the CMC is left with four members: its Chairman Xi Jinping; Vice-Chairmen Zhang Youxia and Zhang Shengmin; and the Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff Department Liu Zhenli.

of self-revolution, first introduced by Xi Jinping in 2015, which argues that only continuous self-investigation and self-examination can secure the Party's survival and success. The Communiqué pledges 'unending perseverance and tenacity to resolutely implement the Party's self-revolution'.

This uphill endeavour should also be considered in the context of the overwhelming trend of centralisation and consolidation of CPC leadership, robustly upheld by the appeal to rally around the Central Committee 'with Xi Jinping at its core'. Xi has steadily affirmed his role as the mastermind of advancing China's socialist modernisation, building a great country, and achieving national rejuvenation, and will continue to guide the Party toward the 21st Congress.

In conclusion, the Fourth Plenum inspires confidence that China will maintain a forward-looking course toward achieving the Second Centenary Goal. The Communiqué provides a blueprint for development over the next five years and beyond, primarily with qualitative recommendations, while the 15th Five-Year Plan containing quantitative targets will be drafted by the State Council and adopted by the National People's Congress at the two parliamentary sessions next March. It is, however, clear that the CPC pursues steadily its time-tested governance model, projecting continuity, deepening indigenous innovation, and strengthening self-reliance, while simultaneously implementing corrective measures deemed necessary, whether economic policy adjustments or personnel changes in the PLA. The key messages conveyed to the world are stable growth, stable policies, and stable expectations. Notable moments include the additional emphasis on advanced manufacturing and domestic demand. Thoughtfully crafted balances suggest that the next phase of socialist modernisation will unfold through carefully sequenced reforms rather than sudden leaps, enabling 'new quality productive forces' to achieve 'high-quality development' as a central task. China's international partners can expect the country's leadership to remain committed to opening-up, globalisation, multilateralism, environmental protection, and economic cooperation, despite numerous pressing challenges. Beijing is perfectly on course to sustain its 30-percent contribution to global economic growth.

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