

Policy Adjustments at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CCP Central Committee

Wen-Hsuan Tsai

Research Fellow, Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

Abstract

On July 30, the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced the main agenda for the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CCP Central Committee. The agenda included two items, namely: a work report from the Politburo and a study of proposals for the 15th Five-Year Plan.¹ The meeting was to assess the current economic situation and outline economic work for the second half of the year. This paper discusses the policy and personnel adjustments made by the CCP at the Fourth Plenary Session and their implications. In matters of policy, the CCP declared its intention to strengthen the development of high technology and hopes to achieve technological self-sufficiency and expand domestic demand. This implies a struggle for technological leadership with the United States and other Western powers. In terms of personnel, the CCP has expelled several generals involved in alleged corruption from the party and the military. Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign targeting the military is likely to continue for some time, with crackdowns on cliques within the People's Liberation Army.

Keywords: 15th Five-Year Plan, Anti-Corruption, Expanding Domestic Demand, People's Liberation Army, Technological Self-Reliance

I. Background of the Meeting

Based on the announcement of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee in July, the meeting was convened to

1. Xi Jinping, "Explanation of the 'Suggestions of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development'," October 31, 2025, *People's Daily Online*, <<http://politics.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2025/1031/c1001-40594137.html>>.

preserve strategic composure and secure the initiative in international competition amid increasing uncertainties in national development. This implies that while China continues to assert that it has a stable economic foundation, development conditions, and market, risks remain. In particular, challenges posed by the United States could have an impact on the CCP's continued promotion of its so-called Chinese-style modernization.² Therefore, based on these domestic and international circumstances, the CCP's approach to the current economic and social landscapes is relatively cautious, and officials continue to attribute the economic downturn to the U.S. factor in an effort to divert public attention. Furthermore, the CCP emphasizes the following priorities in this order: (1) Bottom-line thinking, which requires economic



Figure 1. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CCP Central Committee

Source: Xi Jinping, “Explanation of the ‘Suggestions of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development’.”

2 Jing Wu & Xiao-Pu Guan “Understanding Chinese-style Modernization Through the Five-Year Plan,” October 22, 2025, *Institute of Party History and Literature of the Central Party*, <<https://www.dswxyjy.org.cn/BIG5/n1/2025/1022/c244516-40587075.html>>.

sectors to fully prepare for worst-case scenarios; (2) Stabilization of employment, businesses, the market, and expectations to ensure progress in livelihood projects in key areas, communities, and local governments; (3) Implementation of fiscal and loose monetary policies to support scientific and technological innovation, small and micro enterprises, and foreign investment; and (4) Governance, which requires leading cadres and key entrepreneurs to maintain an appropriate understanding of their performance and adhere to the spirit and policies of the Eight Regulations of the Central Committee. This demonstrated that economic, diplomatic, and personnel revisions would be the focus of discussion at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CCP.

On the economic front, beginning on September 30, the *People's Daily* published a series of eight articles titled “Special Reports on the Chinese Economy Under the Guidance of Xi Jinping’s Economic Thought” under the pen name “Zhong Caiwen” (Central Finance and Economics Commission).³ This series elaborated on China’s economic landscape and the direction of future economic work. Taken together, the articles comprehensively conveyed the message that the CCP intends to impart: while global competition is an important factor in China’s development, China has its own development system and pace. China should objectively view the challenges and opportunities that are currently influencing economic transformation and upgrading, correctly recognize the inevitability of high-quality economic development, and thus recognize that China is a global model for human rights, environmental protection, balanced regional development, and the provision of public goods to the international community.⁴

The CCP clearly intended to unify perspectives ahead of the meeting while signaling a desire to boost foreign investment, overall social investment, and

3. “The People’s Daily published eight articles by Zhong Caiwen, providing an in-depth analysis of the logic and opportunities for China’s economic development,” October 9, 2025, *People’s Daily Online*, <<http://finance.people.com.cn/n1/2025/1009/c70846-40578339.html>>.

4. Cai-Wen Zhong, “China’s economic transformation and upgrading present significant opportunities,” October 3, 2025, *People’s Daily Online*, <<https://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2025/1003/c64387-40576361.html>>.

consumer confidence. It also aimed to demonstrate that its power rivals that of the United States in industries such as artificial intelligence, biomedicine, and green energy. Although the publication of these arguments aroused public sentiment in the short term by signaling the economic themes of the Fourth Plenary Session and even the 15th Five-Year Plan in advance, this extensive preparation reflected the party's urgent concern regarding the state of the economy and underscored the extent of China's economic slowdown.

Personnel issues have also become a focus of public attention. The convening of the Fourth Plenum clarified the extent of the dismissal of officials from the Central Committee. Relatively accurate data currently indicate that as many as 46 officials from the 20th Central Committee have come under investigation, 19 of whom have been



Figure 2. Nine High-Ranking PLA Generals Have Been Expelled from the Party and the Military

Source: Depositphotos.

formally dismissed from their posts. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) — a major focus of anti-corruption efforts in recent years — has witnessed a reduction, with the Central Military Commission (CMC) going from seven to four members. On October 17, Chinese Ministry of National Defense spokesman Zhang Xiaogang announced that nine high-ranking PLA generals — He Weidong, Miao Hua, He Hongjun, Wang Xiubin, Lin Xiangyang, Qin Shutong, Yuan Huazhi, Wang Houbin, and Wang Chunling — had been expelled from the Party and the military. Consequently, they have been transferred to military prosecutors for investigation for “serious violations of Party discipline and suspected serious duty-related crimes involving extremely large amounts of money, extremely serious nature, and extremely detrimental consequences.” While ongoing purges may help reinforce discipline, they may also dampen enthusiasm among cadres, thus leading to a rigid governance and impacting the economy. Therefore, the Fourth Plenum represents a crucial juncture for assessing the extent to which economic development and political security can proceed in tandem.

Since the start of the tariff war in April this year, U.S.-China relations have entered a new phase of competition. In the near term, trade tensions are expected to persist. China has stopped buying soybeans from the United States, while the United States has responded by considering halting its purchase of Chinese edible oil. On October 9, China announced an expansion of its rare earth export controls effective December 1. This regulation mandates that all exports containing more than 0.1% rare earth content — or using Chinese rare earth refining, magnet manufacturing, or recycling technology — will require an export license.⁵ Military rare earth exports, meanwhile, are prohibited. It is a powerful card in the hands of the CCP. To date, approximately 70% of rare earth imports in the United States — for use in electric vehicles, mobile phones, wind power, lasers, and defense equipment — originate from China. Therefore, any supply restriction would exert pressure on U.S. technology and defense industries. In response, the Trump administration announced a 100%

5. Bao-Shan Hong, “More serious than imagined! How long can Taiwanese manufacturers survive under China’s 0.1% rare earth technology control?” October 18, 2025, *Commercial Times*, <<https://www.ctee.com.tw/news/20251018700009-430502>>.

tariff increase on Chinese goods — raising the total tariff to 130% — and reinstated previous restrictions on the export of chip design software. Furthermore, both countries have recently begun levying mutual port fees on shipping; in particular, the United States has launched a Section 301 investigation into China's maritime, logistics, and shipbuilding industries.⁶

In summary, tensions surrounding U.S.-China tariffs and trade wars have expanded from chips and rare earths to grains, soybeans, and shipbuilding. Although speculations exist regarding a potential meeting between both leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in late October, rapid changes in U.S. and Chinese economic stances have exerted material impacts on industries, investors, and even downstream consumer groups. While the Fourth Plenum was unlikely to directly address U.S.-China relations or other related issues, the tone it has established for the economy in the second half of the year and over the next five years may provide insights into the main direction and approach of future competition with the U.S.

II. The 15th Five-Year Plan

1. Green Energy, Scientific and Technological Innovation, and Urban-Rural Stability in High-Quality Development

Prior to the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP, Premier Li Qiang convened a symposium with experts and entrepreneurs to discuss the economic landscape and invited them to actively offer recommendations. During the meeting, he emphasized the need to continuously expand domestic demand, strengthen domestic circulation, promote consumption, accelerate the commercialization of scientific and technological achievements, and stabilize foreign trade and investment. Data indicate that China's current economic situation is not only influenced by the United States but is also severely impacted by insufficient domestic

6. "The Ministry of Commerce responded to China's announcement of countermeasures against the US' Section 301 investigation and restrictions on Chinese shipbuilding and other industries," October 11, 2025, *People's Daily Online*, <<http://finance.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2025/1011/c1004-40579796.html>>.

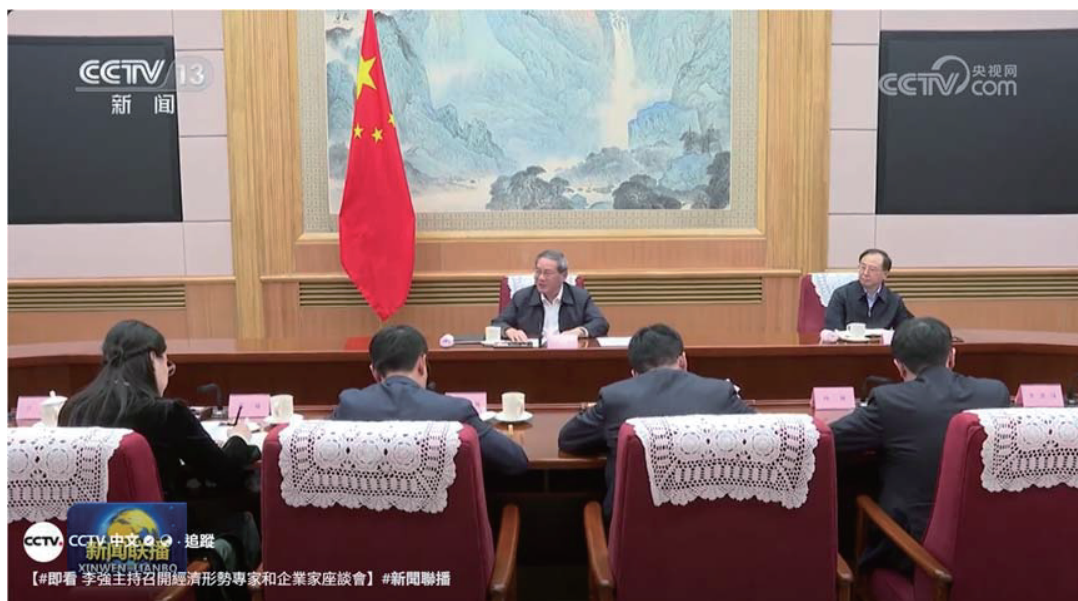


Figure 3. Premier Li Qiang Convenes a Symposium with Experts and Entrepreneurs to Discuss the Economic Landscape

Source: CCTV, 〈李强主持召开经济形势专家和企业家座谈会〉, October 15, 2025, *Facebook*, <<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1230813448768786>>.

demand. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, consumer and producer price indexes continue to decline, which indicates that deflation remains a persistent problem. Therefore, this structural issue was expected to be specifically emphasized in the 15th Five-Year Plan. Consequently, future policies may benefit from a combination of supply-side structural adjustments and aggressive demand-side stimuli to combat deflation.

Based on current reports and information released by Chinese official media, the 15th Five-Year Plan is expected to continue its prioritization of high-quality development and particularly focus on green energy, scientific/technological innovation, and livelihood improvement in urban and rural areas. On October 20, the day of the Fourth Plenum, the *People's Daily* published an article titled “Leading the Future: What China Has Done Right” under the pseudonym “Ren Zhongping.” The article first highlighted China’s achievements in, and determination to pursue, green development — linking this goal with scientific/technological innovation and viewing

it as a result of technology-driven industrial innovation. This perspective implies that China may seek to establish a closer integration between low-carbon transformation and scientific/technological achievements.⁷ Moreover, this stance coincides with the 20th anniversary of the concept “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” and the 10th anniversary of the *Paris Agreement*. By doing so, China intends to seize opportunities emerging from global carbon reduction trends and a new round of technological competition. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China’s industrial policies and subsidies have, indeed, fostered breakthroughs in green technologies,



Figure 4. China Captures a Significant Share of the Global Electric Vehicle Market

Source: Depositphotos.

7. “People’s Daily article by Ren Zhongping: Leading the Future: What Did China Do Right?” October 20, 2025, *Wenhui Daily*, <<https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202510/20/AP68f624a4e4b0014d6f494c7d.html>>.

such as electric vehicles, which enabled China to capture a significant share of the global electric vehicle market and subsequently posed a threat to related industries in Europe and the United States. However, this development has also sparked concerns in these countries regarding about subsidies and market distortions, leading to increased scrutiny of China's trade and investment. Moving forward, China is expected to face challenges related to international institutional barriers and strategic adjustments in the promotion of its green energy industry at the international level.

China views investment as a means of continuing to upgrade its infrastructure and industries, as well as strengthening its global position in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. For the next five years, its planning will likely adopt a hybrid strategy of “investment + innovation + green transformation.” Investment will stabilize aggregate demand; industrial support and R&D investment will boost medium- and long-term competitiveness; and social support will be provided through stable urban and rural livelihoods and employment. This scheme will ensure that high-quality development integrates technological advancement with a balanced focus on domestic demand and livelihood. For example, on the day of the Fourth Plenum, *Xinhua News Agency* published an article featuring the construction of the “two networks” (i.e., National Comprehensive Three-Dimensional Transportation Network and National Water Network) in China.⁸ The article emphasized that, despite external risks, the Party-State continues to prioritize the improvement of livelihoods within its internal governance, and high-quality development integrates the latest technologies and policies on environmental protection. Moreover, the Chinese government will continue to face risks such as international political and economic friction, weak domestic demand, and disparity in local implementation. The effectiveness of this strategy will depend on the precision of policy design and the ability of the government to coordinate across departments.

8 “Ensure decisive progress in basically realizing socialist modernization,” October 20, 2025, *Xinhua News Agency*, <<http://www.news.cn/politics/20251020/c41050408bda49a88aae740e7543315c/c.html>>.

2. Development and Security

In addition to the prioritization of economic development as a key agenda for the Fourth Plenum, the CCP also emphasizes security, which can be discussed from three perspectives. First, the dismissal of numerous high-ranking officials prior to the Fourth Plenum indicates ongoing internal restructuring. Second, and particularly with regard to economic issues, a question emerges on how foreign investment can regain confidence in an environment that the CCP claims is open but, in reality, is tightly controlled — an issue in striking a balance between development and security. Third, China’s competition with the United States influences the CCP’s approach to its economic security.

First, on the day of the Fourth Plenum, *Xinhua News Agency* published an editorial titled “Writing a New Chapter of Chinese Modernization in Continuing Struggle.” Across four instances, the article emphasized Xi’s core role, which implies that the CCP continues to uphold this focus as reference for development. In contrast to expectations, Xi’s power remains strong, and anti-corruption and officialdom purges are expected to continue. Instead, they are viewed as a means of mitigating various development-related risks. Therefore, these measures for maintaining political security will continue to be framed as governance strategies geared toward economic development, thereby stabilizing public sentiment.

Second, according to data from China’s State Administration of Foreign Exchange, foreign direct investment in China significantly decreased to \$8.7 billion in the second quarter of this year from \$14.7 billion in the first quarter.⁹ This confirms the view that turbulent U.S.-China relations are having a significant negative impact on investors. Furthermore, as the United States is becoming increasingly vigilant about China’s transshipment of products through third countries, anticipated improvements in the Chinese economic landscape have yet to be realized. These expected effects remain limited despite China’s early release of the “2025 Action

9. “A weak economy and tariff war have accelerated the withdrawal of foreign investment, with China’s second-quarter FDI reaching only 8% of its peak,” August 10, 2025, *Liberty Times*, <<https://ec.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/5138898>>.

Plan to Stabilize Foreign Investment” through the Ministry of Commerce and the National Development and Reform Commission. The plan aims to expand pilot programs in various sectors, such as telecommunications, healthcare, and education, and to formulate incentives to encourage the domestic reinvestment of foreign-invested enterprises. China’s current domestic challenges originate not only from the government’s stringent control over capital flows due to the intensified U.S.-China competition, but also from the severe internal market involution and sluggish demand. Therefore, insights that emerged during the Fourth Plenum and the 15th Five-Year Plan for addressing these challenges were of great interest.

Finally, in the context of ongoing competition with the United States, the CCP’s approach to economic security is crucial. The ongoing Sino-U.S. trade war has gradually shifted China’s foreign trade away from dependence on the U.S., leading to increased exports to Africa, Southeast Asia, and the EU. However, this scenario has posed numerous challenges. A case in point is the automotive industry, in which overcapacity has led to fierce competition. As companies seek overseas markets such as Southeast Asia and Africa, friction has arisen among China, the U.S., and other

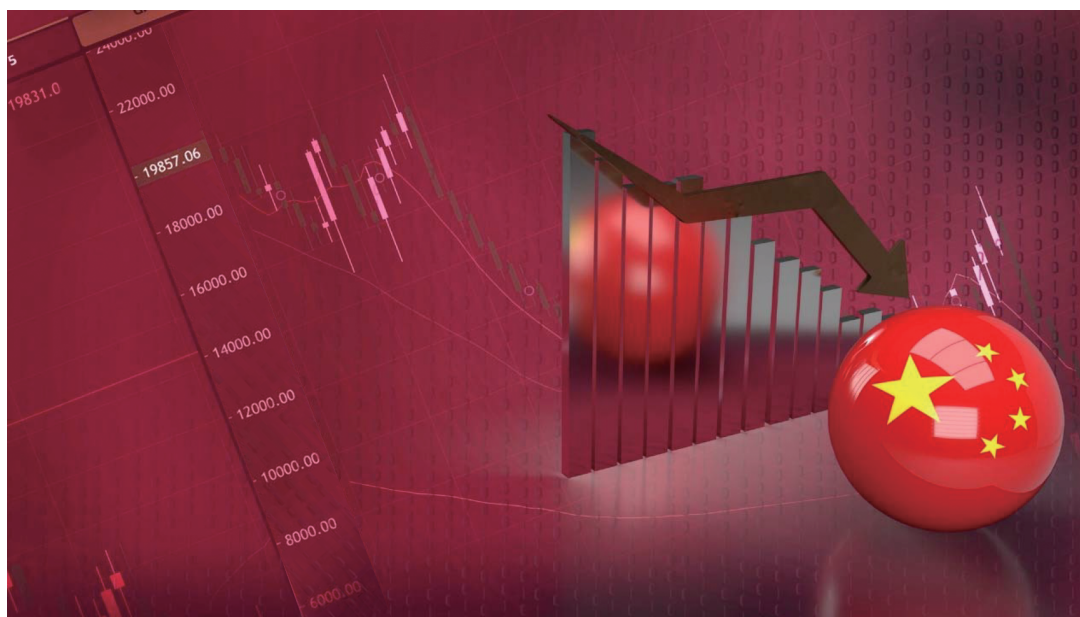


Figure 5. FDI in China Significantly Decreased in the Second Quarter of 2025

Source: Depositphotos.

trading partners. This scenarios appear to be relatively different from the concept of the so-called economic security. Overall, this increased reliance on exports to emerging markets may also increase the complexity and pressure of adjustments that China faces in its efforts to transform economic structure and strengthen independent development. Furthermore, to date, the majority of China's trading partners have avoided taking a clear stance, opting for risk-averse measures, which threatens to keep China entangled in the complexities of international relations, geopolitical pressures, and economic security needs.

3. Encouraging Domestic Consumption

Stimulating demand has also been a major challenge for the CCP in recent years. In its communiqué, the CCP mentioned the need to “build a strong domestic market and accelerate the construction of a new development pattern.” On the one hand, it represents an attempt to decrease dependence on external markets by strengthening domestic circulation and stimulating consumption and investment — a direct response to the Sino-U.S. decoupling and restructuring of global supply chains. On the other hand, Beijing's so-called new development pattern is essentially an economic model focused on internal circulation. Therefore, the CCP's potential use of policy measures to stimulate domestic consumption and investment is foreseeable.

In the context of agricultural and rural modernization, rural revitalization was once again emphasized. This emphasis is still intended to prevent a resurgence of poverty and consolidate the social foundation of the CCP in rural areas. From the perspective of regional development, this new urbanization strategy will be upheld in an effort to bridge the economic gap between coastal and inland areas and improve overall land efficiency through regional integration. These measures for addressing urban-rural issues not only aim to bridge the long-standing development gap but also to prevent potential social unrest amid an economic slowdown. With regards to people's livelihoods and social governance, the CCP continues to address the relevant issues through slogans such as “common prosperity,” “healthy China,” and “safe China,” which mainly remains consistent with previous schemes. However, for green transformation, the CCP maintains its *dual carbon* goals (carbon peak and neutrality) while defining developmental legitimacy through the concept of green growth.¹⁰ In

conjunction with the Fourth Plenum, the official media's extensive coverage of green energy-related issues reflects the CCP's effort to establish a renewed national image and an international voice through green governance.

4. Ethnicity, Culture, and Ideology

In this context, the conference communiqué highlights the CCP's emphasis on spiritual civilization. Under the guise of building a "culturally strong nation" and promoting "cultural confidence," the CCP continues to strengthen ideological integration, with the objective of re-consolidating the Party-State's legitimacy and narrative dominance in increasingly diverse social environment. Therefore, given the communiqué's emphasis on "accelerating the development of the cultural industry," the CCP is likely to increasingly underscore Xinjiang and Tibet; ethnic minorities; and religious issues in the future, further leveraging the economy to link the survival and development of minority cultures with economic interests.

III. Personnel Arrangements

1. Political Struggle and Purge

At this meeting, only 168 out of the original 205 members of the Central Committee attended. One former member passed away, while 10 other members have been dismissed; 26 officials were believed to be under investigation for corruption and were unable to attend. The situation in the military was particularly serious. Apart from He Weidong, Miao Hua, He Hongjun, Wang Xiubin, Lin Xiangyang, Qin Shutong, Yuan Hua, Wang Chunning, and Zhang Fengzhong, who were confirmed at the meeting to have committed serious violations of discipline and law, the status of 14 others who were also unable to attend remains unknown.¹¹ Furthermore, during

10. Xu Liu & Wan-Fa Wang, "Looking towards the 15th Five-Year Plan: Actively and steadily promote carbon peaking and carbon neutrality," May 14, 2025, *People's Daily Online*, <<http://theory.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2025/0514/c40531-40479234.html>>.

11. "Can the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CCP Central Committee, with a large number of officials absent, help Xi Jinping realize his dream of technological self-reliance?" October 24, 2025, *CommonWealth Magazine*, <<https://www.cw.com.tw/article/5137990>>.



Figure 6. A Significant Purge of Military Officials

Source: Depositphotos.

the Fourth Plenum, Zhang Shengmin was appointed as Vice Chairman of the CMC. In accordance with the Party Constitution, Yu Huiwen, Ma Hancheng, Wang Jian, Wang Xi, Wang Yonghong, Wang Tingkai, Wang Xinwei, Wei Tao, Deng Yiwu, Deng Xiuming, and Lu Hong — were added as alternate members of the Central Committee.

This meeting witnessed a significant purge of military officials. In fact, Xi's large-scale anticorruption campaign against the PLA began as early as 2013. On the day after the conclusion of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee, the *PLA Daily* published an editorial emphasizing that "the Party commands the armed forces" and calling the anti-corruption campaign "a major political struggle that we cannot afford to lose and must not lose." In addition, the editorial stated that, since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, "President Xi has vigorously turned the tide, addressed crises, and stabilized the situation." He has unwaveringly upheld strict and comprehensive Party and military discipline, while advancing political training and combating corruption with unprecedented resolve and intensity, thus achieving historic achievements in the political development of the military

in the new era. The *PLA Daily* had earlier reported that the nine generals expelled from the Party and dismissed from military service had “seriously undermined the principle of the Party commanding the armed forces and the system of responsibility of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission,” causing significant harm to the political ecology of the military.

Notably, the majority of the dismissed generals belong to the 31st Group Army in Fujian, a unit under the Eastern Theater Command, and expected to be one of the major forces in any potential Chinese military operation against Taiwan.¹² Xi held a number of government positions in Fujian, and many of the generals in the group army were acquainted with him. Thus, Xi’s promotion of numerous generals from the 31st Group Army to the CMC and other key positions is unsurprising. However, the recent large-scale dismissal and restructuring of military leaders have effectively eliminated the Fujian-based military faction.

This development will likely have several consequences. First, it has delivered a fundamental blow to what would be the primary force spearheading a military offensive against Taiwan. For example, Vice Chairman of the CMC He Weidong and former Eastern Theater Command Commander Lin Xiangyang are familiar with the situation in the Taiwan Strait and have participated in numerous related exercises due to their experience in these roles. This purge could weaken the CCP’s ability to launch an aggressive campaign against Taiwan in the coming years.

Second, Xi’s crackdown on his military confidants demonstrates that he has begun to look for enemies within the Party. The political environment in China today leaves little room for the existence of factions such as the Youth League, the Shanghai Gang, or the Princelings. Xi holds absolute power and tends to constantly use political purges to reinforce respect for him among party cadres. With few external enemies, Xi

12. “Nine generals, including He Weidong, have been dismissed from their posts. Hong Kong media reports that the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CCP Central Committee may involve adjustments to the Central Military Commission,” October 19, 2025, *United Daily News*, <<https://udn.com/news/story/7331/9079721>>.



Figure 7. Xi Jinping's Military Purges May Affect Plans for an Offensive Against Taiwan

Source: Depositphotos.

has initiated internal purges to balance the dynamics within the Xi faction. The 31st Group Army is a prime example of Xi's crackdown on internal factions. Xi hopes that this unexpected action will reshape external judgment of his governance and deter other factions aligned against Xi.

Finally, Xi's actions function as another warning to the Party against the creation of so-called *cliques*. Miao Hua — former Director of the Work Department of the CMC, who was recently dismissed — was responsible for cadre assessment and recruitment. This position increased the likelihood of promotion of officers from the 31st Group Army to high positions. However, it also resulted in a loss of power for Xi as Chairman of the CMC. Xi has drawn this lesson from the long-term dominance of military power by Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou during Hu Jintao's administration. In the future, CCP cadres and officials may experience increased insecurity and alienation from one another, thus becoming atomized individuals. Consequently, they may only pledge loyalty toward Xi and encourage reporting on cliques among other

cadres. This scenario is a classic example of a reign of terror, fully concentrating political power in Xi alone.

2. Personnel Selection and Political Loyalty

This meeting also promoted several cadres. Notably, the only appointment to the CMC was the promotion of Zhang Shengmin (a former CMC member) to Vice Chairman. The current CMC consists of one chairman (Xi), two vice chairmen (Zhang Youxia and Zhang Shengmin), and one member (Liu Zhenli). Typically, the CMC consists of seven members: a chairman, two vice chairmen, and four members. The current CMC has three unfilled positions, which indicates that Xi's purging of military leaders continues, and the decision on who will be promoted to CMC membership remains uncertain. Another possibility is that Xi intentionally left these positions vacant to encourage competition and even mutual denunciation among generals — thereby gaining his allegiance and enabling him to control the military's power.

The promotion of Zhang Shengmin to Vice Chairman of the CMC also warrants a close examination. Zhang Shengmin had extensive experience in the Second Artillery Corps (now known as the Rocket Force), frequently serving as a political commissar.¹³ He was appointed Director of the Political Department of the Second Artillery Corps in December 2014, and Political Commissar of the Logistics Support Department of the CMC in July 2016. In October 2022, he became a member of the CMC and Deputy Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection — overseeing anti-corruption efforts within the military, particularly the Rocket Force. During this process, he reportedly offended his former superiors, including Rocket Force Commander Wei Fenghe — placing numerous colleagues and superiors within

13. "Another reshuffle of the top ranks of the Chinese military: Zhang Shengmin, a key figure in the anti-corruption campaign, promoted to Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission," October 23, 2025, *RFI*, <<https://www.rfi.fr/tw/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9C%8B/20251023-%E4%B8%AD%E5%85%B1%E8%BB%8D%E6%96%B9%E9%AB%98%E5%B1%A4%E5%86%8D%E8%AA%BF%E6%95%B4-%E5%8F%8D%E8%85%90%E6%A0%B8%E5%BF%83%E4%BA%BA%E7%89%A9%E5%BC%B5%E5%8D%87%E6%B0%91%E6%99%89%E9%99%9E%E8%BB%8D%E5%A7%94%E5%89%AF%E4%B8%BB%E5%B8%AD>>.

the Rocket Force under serious investigation. For Xi, doing so was an act of loyalty. Simply put, Xi favors cadres who are loyal only to him and willing to challenge others, including their superiors. Zhang Shengmin's promotion may also lead to a more prevalent culture of infighting and whistleblowing within the officialdom, which may also be consistent with Xi's intended outcome.

Furthermore, Zhang Shengmin originates from Shaanxi, Xi's hometown. Thus, he may have been promoted by Zhang Youxia and considered a candidate acceptable to Xi and the military. In his future role, Zhang Shengmin may continue to support Xi's anti-corruption initiatives, particularly targeting illicit activities within high-tech military units. Furthermore, the relationship between Xi and Zhang Youxia presents a complex dynamic. Zhang Youxia's father, Zhang Zongsun, was Xi Zhongxun's colleague, and the two families share a deep connection. Xi Jinping and Zhang Youxia — one of the few current senior PLA generals with combat experience in the Vietnam War of 1979 — have known each other since childhood.¹⁴ Therefore, Xi may temporarily refrain from purging or targeting Zhang Youxia and is more likely to form a political alliance with him. However, this alliance will likely be based primarily on Xi's opinions, and Zhang will act as a subordinate — assisting Xi in stabilizing the military and promoting military reform.

IV. Absence of a Sign of a Power Transfer from Xi Jinping

Prior to this meeting, many media outlets and observers speculated that Xi may appoint younger officials to the Politburo. Notably, Politburo member He Weidong was dismissed at this meeting. The 20th National Congress elected only 24 members of the Politburo, with the option of adding 25 members according to convention. Therefore, at least two additional Politburo seats could have been filled. However, no such arrangement occurred at this meeting, which indicates that Xi does not intend to hand over power until at least the 21st National Party Congress. Furthermore, a

14. "The Fourth Plenary Session is about to begin, and the personnel changes in the Central Military Commission will reveal Xi Jinping's power," October 15, 2025, *RTI*, <<https://www.rti.org.tw/news?uid=3&pid=170036>>.

number of observers speculated that Xi's power may be contested, and he may be forced to relinquish his position as General Secretary or Chairman of the CMC. These predictions remained unconfirmed at this meeting, which demonstrates the high degree of consolidation of Xi's power.

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee can be considered a preview of the 21st National Party Congress, which highlights that Xi's purge of the military will continue. Furthermore, Xi will not hand over power at the 21st National Party Congress. Even his resignation at the 22nd National Party Congress is in question. In current Chinese politics, no one will dare to express dissent due to the assumption that Xi is the undisputed leader. This perspective has significantly weakened the mechanisms of the CCP system for identifying and rectifying mistakes. These may lead to major flaws in the CCP's decision-making and, thus, cause irreparable damage.

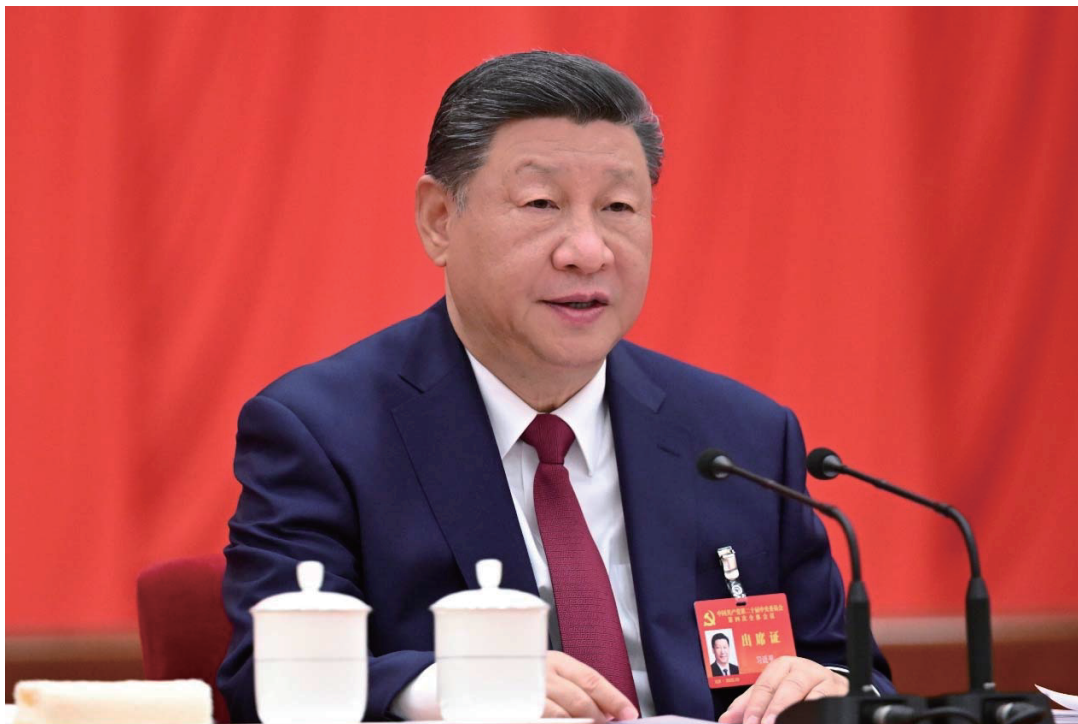


Figure 8. Xi Jinping Has Yet to Establish a Clear Succession Plan

Source: Depositphotos.

V. Conclusion

China has increasingly embraced political strategies for addressing economic challenges in recent years by integrating potential solutions to economic issues into the framework of political stability and national security. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the CCP primarily discussed the 15th Five-Year Plan and the implementation of Chinese-style modernization, the development of new productivity, independent technological innovation, and the green and digital transformation of industries. Although these prospects appear promising, we must remain cautiously optimistic about the direction of China's development in terms of personnel policy. Ultimately, Xi Jinping controls China's political bureaucracy through factional balancing and checks and balances, which renders Xi's political system highly authoritarian and uncertain.

Furthermore, Xi has yet to establish a clear succession plan, thus making China's post-Xi development uncertain. After eliminating external enemies, Xi is constantly searching for enemies within the Xi faction — generating panic among former colleagues and friends. This system of terror has rendered the expression of views that diverge from Xi's nearly impossible for Chinese officials. This condition poses a significant challenge to China's overall development and policymaking. Ultimately, Xi's true enemy may neither be these corrupt officials nor the constraints imposed by the United States or Taiwan: it is highly centralized and opaque nature of the CCP system that has fueled Xi's frenzied pursuit of power and his crackdown on officials. These phenomena are likely persist during the duration of Xi's time in office.