

The 6th plenum of the CCP Central Committee in November 2021 passed a landmark resolution on the party's one hundred years of history. While the document briefly reviews the party's 91 years of existence before the rise of Xi Jinping, it devotes more than half of its space to an affirmation of Xi's policies during the last nine years. The timing of the resolution, its effusive praise of Xi's record, and its elevation of Xi's stature are intended to strengthen his case for extending his term in office. The resolution is thus more a work of political advocacy than of historical revisionism. The language of the resolution also provides important clues about Xi's ideological beliefs and conception of his stature in the party. The sections in the resolution on foreign policy vigorously endorse Xi's approach, and their defiant tone suggests a continuation of Xi's current policy. However, the same evidence of Xi's political dominance can also be interpreted as reflective of concerns within the party about the direction of the party under his leadership.

The 6th plenum of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was convened in early November 2021, approved a historic document, "The CCP Center's Resolution on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party's Century of Struggle" (中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议).¹ The party has passed only three such resolutions in its one hundred years of existence. The first resolution, titled "Resolution on Several Historical Questions" (关于若干历史问题的决议), was passed in April 1945 at the urging of Mao Zedong.² The second resolution, titled "Resolution on the Party's Several Historical Questions since the Founding of the State" (关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议), was approved by the Central Committee in June 1981 at the urging of Deng Xiaoping.

Despite the propaganda blitz launched by the CCP following release of the party's third resolution on its history, many questions remain about the General Secretary Xi Jinping's political motives for producing this document, the key similarities and differences under which the three resolutions were produced, the substance of Xi's version of party history, and implications for future policy. We attempt to address these questions in this analysis. First, we

¹ "中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议,"

http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/16/content_5651269.htm, accessed January 29, 2022.

² "关于若干历史问题的决议,"

<http://www.12371.cn/2021/11/09/ARTI1636455732201149.shtml>, accessed January 29, 2022.

analyze the differences and similarities in circumstances in the births of these three documents. We then perform a textual analysis to gain insights into Xi's ideological beliefs and self-conception of his power and historical stature by comparing this 2021 resolution with the second resolution produced under Deng's aegis. Finally, we examine the sections in the resolution that address Chinese foreign policy because they contain important signals of the current Chinese leadership's thinking about external challenges.

Similarities and Some Notable Differences

We can find remarkable similarities in the circumstances under which these three resolutions on party history were produced. The most important one is that passage of these documents occurred after each leader, Mao, Deng, or Xi Jinping, had succeeded in consolidating their respective power and had established unchallengeable supremacy within the CCP leadership. Additionally, in each case the dominant leader directly supervised the drafting process and selected loyalists to staff the drafting committee. The major role played by the dominant leader in the production of these documents indicates that these resolutions were critical to their power.

In the case of the first resolution, Mao had just vanquished his Moscow-backed rival, Wang Ming (aka Chen Shaoyu), and also had concluded an inner-party purge (the "rectification campaign"). In May 1944 Mao reportedly decided to form a committee to draft a resolution on the party's historical questions and he appointed his loyalist Ren Bishi to head the drafting committee, which also included Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi (who was then a staunch Mao ally although he would become the most prominent victim of Mao's purges during the Cultural Revolution), and Hu Qiaomu (who later became Mao's principal speech writer). The resolution was largely based on an essay Mao had written in 1942, titled "A Draft on Historical Questions" (历史问题草案). Mao personally had edited this draft extensively several times and gave the document its title.³

When the drafting committee for the party's second resolution on history was formed in November 1979, Deng had already established his supremacy within the party. At the historic 3rd plenum of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978, Deng and his fellow revolutionary veterans effectively deposed Hua Guofeng, the weak interim leader who had taken over leadership of the party after the death of Mao in 1976. Although Deng selected Hu Yaobang, a liberal reformer whom he considered a loyalist, to co-chair the drafting committee with him, he relied heavily on Hu Qiaomu, the opportunistic conservative who had played a key role in drafting the first resolution. Deng Liqun, a staunch conservative, was also involved in the drafting process. Chen Yun, the conservative economic planner who backed Deng in dethroning Hua Guofeng, insisted on "fully affirming Mao's historical contributions." Additionally, the drafting process was considerably more open and inclusive than the drafting committee that Mao had supervised. The first draft of the 1981 resolution was circulated for comments among 4,000

³ 曲青山,“两个历史决议”的制定背景、主要内容和重要意义,”《党建》杂志,

<https://www.dswxyjy.org.cn/n1/2021/1103/c428053-32272458.html>, accessed January 28, 2022;
“党的六届七中全会和关于若干历史问题的决议,”

https://web.archive.org/web/20150216003816/http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/20/content_697931.htm, accessed January 28, 2022.

high-ranking officials in October 1980 (this would have included nearly all officials at or above the rank of vice minister or deputy provincial governor). At the end of March 1981, a (presumably revised) draft was sent to the top 52 leaders for their opinions. In May 1981, the Politburo invited more than 70 individuals to discuss and comment on the draft. The final draft was circulated among more than 100 “representatives of the democratic parties” (prominent supporters of the CCP who were not official party members).⁴ These details about the drafting process are crucial because the inclusion of both conservative and liberal voices helped produce a document that tried, with great difficulty, to give an honest accounting of the party’s disastrous experience under Mao but without totally discrediting him.

Like Mao and Deng, Xi initiated the process of drafting a new version of party history after establishing his political supremacy. But unlike his predecessors, Xi waited slightly longer to tackle this task. He obviously had fully consolidated power in early March 2018, when he removed the presidential term limit and signaled his intention to break the party’s post-Mao norms on leadership tenure. The most plausible explanation for a delay until March 2021 is that a resolution that affirms the party’s success under his leadership would help make a strong case for extending his tenure if published close to the end of his second term. Comparatively speaking, the drafting process of this third document resembled the drafting of Mao’s first version of party history in terms of its closed process and rapid speed. According to Xi’s speech to the Central Committee’s 6th plenum in November 2021, the Politburo decided to draft a new resolution on party history in March 2021, with a drafting committee to be chaired by Xi himself. Two other members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), Wang Huning and Zhao Leji, were appointed vice chairs of the committee. A draft resolution was produced in early September 2021 and circulated among an unspecified number of officials, including retired senior leaders, for comments. The PSC, which allegedly supervised the drafting process, devoted three meetings to reviewing the drafts (the Politburo had convened two meetings to discuss the drafts).⁵ If we assume that a faster process of drafting is a reasonable indicator of the top leader’s ability to make the document reflect his own views and hence its inclusiveness (or the opposite), then Xi’s resolution took the least amount of time (eight months). Mao’s resolution had taken eleven months to be drafted, and Deng’s resolution, likely the most inclusive and balanced, required a whopping nineteen months.

Besides the difference in the length of time of the drafting process took, the three leaders had different objectives for beginning this process, even though all of them intended for their own version of party history to add to their power. In the case of Mao, the primary objective was to denigrate his predecessors, blame them for the party’s repeated setbacks (if not near-death), minimize their contributions to the revolution, thus enshrining his own ideas as the correct principles for the party to follow. In this document of 27,300 characters, Mao devotes about 8,600 characters – slightly less than one-third – to an accounting of his predecessors’ errors. After affirming the party’s success under Mao (after he was made the top leader at the Zunyi Conference in 1935), the first resolution then uses 12,200 characters, almost half of the

⁴ “关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议诞生,”

<http://www.reformdata.org/2015/12/10/26442.shtml>, accessed February 8, 2022.

⁵ 习近平, “关于《中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议》的说明,”

http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-11/16/content_5651271.htm, accessed January 28, 2022.

document, dissecting the ideological origins of the mistakes committed by Mao's predecessors and contrasting Mao's correct ideas with the ideological and policy errors behind the disasters the party experienced under his predecessors.⁶ Mao's revision of party history was an obvious effort to elevate his brand of revolutionary ideology as the party's guiding principle and, implicitly, to establish himself as the party's indispensable leader if it were to survive (the CCP's existence was still precarious in 1945). The personification of Mao as CCP leader is evidenced by the frequency (51 times) of the appearance of Mao's name within the text of the resolution.

If we compare Mao's resolution with Xi's, it becomes immediately obvious that the drafters of Xi's resolution must have read Mao's resolution very carefully. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Xi's resolution is far more similar in intent to Mao's than it is to Deng's. Like the party's first resolution on history in 1945, Xi's resolution aims to affirm the correctness of his ideological principles and policies after he took power in November 2012. (It may be no coincidence that both Mao and Xi initiated the drafting of their respective versions of party history roughly nine years after they assumed top leadership.) Indeed, 19,200 characters in Xi's resolution, a document of roughly 36,200 characters, are devoted to an accounting of the party's success under Xi's leadership during the nine years since he became CCP general secretary. By contrast, only 10,000 characters are devoted to a recounting of the party's 91 years of existence prior to Xi's assumption of power. Like Mao's resolution, Xi's resolution aims to bolster his personal authority. Even though Xi Jinping had already been party chief for nine years, his name appears in the document 22 times, compared with 18 times for Mao's name (who had already been the head of the CCP for 10 years by 1945) and six times for Deng's name (who had already effectively led the party for about 15 years between 1979 and 1994).

The only difference between Mao's resolution and Xi's is the treatment of their predecessors. Whereas Mao's version of history is unsparingly critical of his predecessors, Xi's resolution is largely positive in assessing his predecessors. The pre-1949 period in Xi's resolution is dealt with in 2,900 characters, with a focus on the party's triumph against seemingly impossible odds. The section on the Maoist period, covered in 2,700 characters, accentuates Mao's achievements while glossing over his calamitous mistakes (the paragraph describing Mao's mistakes such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution consists of only 329 characters). The reason for a relatively positive assessment of his immediate predecessors' record is simple. Ideologically, Xi is too sympathetic to Mao to criticize him harshly (as is done in sections of Deng's resolution). At the same time, from Xi's perspective, explicit

criticism of the records of Deng, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao could likely divide the party and probably would go down poorly with the Chinese public. It is reasonable to say that Xi's resolution differs from Mao's resolution in form but not in essence.

If Mao and Xi both hoped to bolster their authority with their respective resolutions, Deng confronted a different challenge. By November 1979, he had been in effective control of the party's top leadership for barely a year, so there was no real record to affirm. In the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the party remained psychologically and politically traumatized by Mao's tyrannical reign. Deng wanted to move the party forward toward

⁶“关于若干历史问题的决议。”

economic modernization, but this would be difficult to accomplish without an accounting of the party's immediate – and tumultuous – past. In an important way, Deng's task resembled that of Nikita Khrushchev, who felt that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had to be freed from the ghost of Joseph Stalin to function normally. However, neither Deng nor his more conservative coalition partners, such as Chen Yun, wanted to repeat Khrushchev's mistake of de-Stalinization. They knew well that while healing and unifying the CCP with an accounting of history was crucial, the Mao question had to be handled with extreme care.

So in many ways, the CCP's second resolution on history was, in essence, a resolution on Mao's mistakes and achievements. The name of the late dictator appears 106 times in the document. More than half of the document (18,000 characters out of 34,000) is devoted to an accounting of the history of the CCP since 1949. The section on the Cultural Revolution, which devastated the party, contains 6,500 characters of the 18,000 characters devoted to post-1949 history. Mao is criticized for committing "serious mistakes" (严重错误) five times. To counter-balance such a negative assessment of Mao, Deng's resolution devotes an entire section of 7,400 characters to affirming Mao's political and ideological contributions to the party. Unlike the resolutions produced under Mao and Xi, Deng's resolution does not seem to be aimed at strengthening Deng's personal authority. Despite his long service to the party, Deng's name appears in the document only eight times (Deng is credited with success only three times).

Important Clues

The resolution on party history produced under Xi's aegis contains important clues about his ideological beliefs and self-conception of his stature in the pantheon of Chinese leaders. Most notably, Xi's resolution appears to mark a qualitative break with Deng's resolution on the following points:

1. "Leftism" and Criticisms of Mao

"Leftist tendencies" (左倾) is a loaded phrase in Chinese politics and commonly associated with Communist orthodox radicalism, or even extremism, in terms of policy and tactics. Mao's rule typified such "leftist tendencies." Deng's resolution denounces "leftist tendencies" harshly. The phrase appears 20 times in the document (half of them referring to Mao's mistakes either directly or indirectly). By contrast, the phrase "rightist tendencies" (右倾) is used in the party's lexicon to refer to leaders who are more liberal, tolerant, flexible, and less inclined to resort to brutal means to achieve their policy objectives. In Deng's resolution, the phrase "rightist tendencies" appears only twice (in association with the founder of the party, former Peking University professor Chen Duxiu). Notably, Deng's resolution singles out Mao's mistakes of "opposing rightist tendencies" four times. Taken together, Deng's resolution can be interpreted as singling out "leftist tendencies" as the main threat to the party. A victim and witness of the party's "leftist" excesses, Deng knew from his own experience that the party's greatest threat came from its "leftist tendencies." On his historic tour of South China in early 1992, Deng said that "in the party's seven decades of history, all it did was to emphasize 'leftism'.... 'Leftist' things were

terrifying in our party's history and could destroy a good thing instantly.... China should be on guard against the right, but it must mainly guard against the 'left.'"⁷

However, the drafters of Xi's resolution seem to be excessively sensitive to the phrase "leftist tendencies." There is no reference at all to this phrase in the document, even though nearly all the party's past disasters, in particular those during the Maoist era, are attributed to its "leftist tendencies." One likely explanation is that Xi's policies during the last nine years are often characterized as "leftist." Referring to "leftist tendencies" in the latest version of party history may be construed as veiled criticism of Xi. The resolution's "leftist" lean is also evidenced by the brief – if not perfunctory -- treatment of the Maoist era. Whereas Deng's resolution devotes 6,500 characters to criticizing Mao's mistakes during the Cultural Revolution period alone, Xi's resolution spends a total of 329 characters on the party's mistakes during the entire Maoist period. The short passage on the Maoist period in Xi's resolution downplays Mao's culpability (by assigning some of the blame to a "grim external environment" and the "party center's failure to correct" Mao's mistakes "in time") and it attributes the disasters of the Cultural Revolution solely to Lin Biao (Mao's designated successor who died in a mysterious plane crash in September 1971) and the infamous Gang of Four.

2. Elevation of Xi's Stature in CCP History

Given its highly political nature, the language of a resolution, such as the one Xi's drafting committee produced, must be painstakingly crafted and thoroughly scrutinized. As a result, the frequency of the appearance of a key phrase (such as "leftism") contains real political significance. As we mention earlier, the inordinate amount of space of Xi's resolution devotes to affirming his policy achievements and the high frequency of the appearance of Xi's name (22 times), relative to that of Mao (18 times) and Deng (6 times), are two crucial pieces of evidence that reveal that the latest resolution on party history is intended to elevate Xi's historical stature, even above that of the two previous CCP titans. When we examine the frequency of the appearance of the phrase "core" (核心), a CCP political designation signifying supremacy, we see the same pattern. Mao is referred to as the party's core leader only once, whereas Xi is referred to as "core leader" nine times. At the same time, the statures of Deng and Jiang, both of whom received the designation of the "core leader" while in power, appear to have been downgraded because neither is referred to as a "core leader" in Xi's resolution (Hu Jintao never received this designation).

The latest resolution is also notable for the absence of another important phrase —"collective leadership" (nor does Mao's resolution contain any references to "collective leadership"). By contrast, the resolution passed under Deng contains four references to "collective leadership" — once as credit for the party's achievements; once as criticism of Mao who violated collective leadership; and twice as stating collective leadership as a party principle. Deng's resolution does not refer to any single leader as the party's "core." The combination of the high frequency of the appearance of Xi as the "core leader" and the absence of "collective leadership" signals the

⁷ "邓小平：‘左’也能葬送社会主义 主要防‘左’，”

<http://www.reformdata.org/2012/0113/13680.shtml>, accessed February 2, 2022.

intent of the drafters of the latest resolution to elevate Xi's stature above that of all previous leaders and to signal his unchallenged centralized authority.

One can draw two conflicting conclusions from the elevation Xi's stature and the absence of any reference to "leftism" and "collective leadership" in the latest resolution on party history. At face value, the extolling of Xi's stature over past Chinese leaders, the avoidance of references to "leftism," and the emphasis on centralized power, instead of collective leadership, reaffirm the party's unqualified endorsement of Xi's leadership. Yet, at the same time, it is equally plausible that the very same language may also reflect a considerable amount of internal division, political sensitivity, and Xi's sense of vulnerability. In this regard, a comparison with Deng's resolution is instructive. Perhaps the least insecure of all top Chinese leaders, Deng did not try to use the second resolution to elevate his stature or to advertise his achievements, as shown by the few references to his name in the document. One piece of evidence indicative of the need for Xi to address likely (although non-public) concerns about the inordinate amount of space devoted to his tenure in the latest resolution is that he had to devote more than one-third of his speech to the 6th plenum last November explaining why the party center felt it was necessary to pass a new resolution and why this resolution had to focus on his period in office.⁸⁹

Endorsement of Xi's National Security and Foreign Policies

The resolution resoundingly endorses the major national security and foreign-policy initiatives Xi has launched during the last nine years. About one-quarter of the space used to affirm Xi's record since 2013 covers his national security and foreign policies. By and large, the resolution contains three sets of signals on Chinese national security and foreign policies. The most notable is perhaps the tone of defiance and resolve indicating that a change of course in Chinese national security and foreign policies is unlikely in the short to medium term.

1. Reiterating Chinese Strategic Objectives

In terms of military modernization, the resolution reiterates three objectives – achieving "aspirational goals by 2027," "basic national defense and military modernization by 2035," and "a world-class military by the mid-century." The resolution also reiterates Xi's "concept of comprehensive national security" that encompasses "political, military, territorial, economic, cultural, social, scientific and technological, cyber, ecological, resource, nuclear, overseas interests, space, deep sea, polar, and biological domains." The missions of the military in the "new era" include "crisis management and control, deterrence against war, and fighting and winning wars." The means to ensure the successful execution of these missions consist of "strengthening and expanding strategic forces and combat capabilities in new domains, building strong and secure modern coastal maritime and air defense, effectively responding to external military provocations, and deterring acts of Taiwanese independence."¹⁰

⁹ "习近平关于《中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议》的说明," http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-11/16/content_5651271.htm, accessed January 29, 2022.

¹⁰ "中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议."

On the sensitive issue of Taiwan, the resolution attempts to convey both resolve and confidence. While denouncing Taiwanese independence and “interference by external forces,” the resolution insists that the party under Xi has maintained the initiative and the capacity to control the direction of the cross-strait relationship. If one is to believe the resolution’s assertion that “the timing and momentum of the reunification of the motherland are consistently on our side,” the party apparently is trying to project a sense of confidence that it has full control over the volatile Taiwan issue.

2.Reaffirming Xi’s Policy Initiatives and Authority

The bulk of the sections on national security and foreign policies reaffirm the major policy changes or reforms undertaken by Xi since 2013. Besides listing Xi’s well-known foreign-policy initiatives, these sections are notable for underscoring the institutional changes Xi has introduced that have centralized national security and foreign-policy making. The section on “the development of national defense and the military” singles out the “the responsibility system of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission” (军委主席负责制) that has given Xi, who is chairman of the commission, unprecedented authority. The newly established Central National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会), also chaired by Xi, receives a stamp of approval as well. The Central Foreign Affairs Commission (中央外事工作委员会), established in 2018 and chaired by Xi, is not mentioned by name in this section. But the reference to “improving the party’s institutional mechanism of leadership in foreign affairs and strengthening top-level planning in foreign affairs (健全党对外事工作领导体制机制, 加强对外工作顶层设计) is obviously another endorsement of the centralization of foreign-policymaking under Xi.

In terms of explicitly endorsing risky and controversial policies that have profoundly and negatively affected China’s ties with the West, the document devotes considerable space to defend the party’s handling of Hong Kong (the length of the section on Hong Kong is almost twice that on Taiwan). It praises the adoption of the Beijing-imposed National Security Law, changes in Hong Kong’s electoral laws, implementation of the principle of “Hong Kong ruled by patriots” (爱国者治港), and the crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. It would be a mistake to accept such endorsement as reflecting the party’s support for a move that effectively ends “One Country, Two Systems” governance in the former British colony and fuels tensions between China and the West. A likely explanation is that, like many other policies undertaken since Xi’s rise to power that have adversely affected China’s ties with the West, Beijing’s move on Hong Kong remains deeply controversial among Chinese elites.

3.Signaling Defiance and Resolve

Those watching for signals that China may be willing to compromise or back down from its assertive foreign-policy stance will unlikely find many in the resolution. On the one hand, the resolution paints a world in which the balance of power is undergoing a profound shift (that is implicitly in China’s favor) but the dangers to Chinese interests from “unilateralism, protectionism, hegemonism, and power politics” (all implicit references to American power and conduct) are also rising. On the other hand, the resolution tries to project defiance and resolve. While reiterating Beijing’s foreign-policy principle of “resolutely opposing unilateralism, protectionism, hegemonism, and power politics,” the resolution contains one passage particularly noteworthy for its defiant tone. “The party center deeply believes that, in face of all types of

containment, pressure, trouble-making, and subversive activities, [we] must exercise the spirit of not believing in evil fallacies and not fearing ghosts, and we must wage a struggle to the end against the forces attempting to subvert the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and our country's socialist system and to slow down or even stop the progress of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Ceaseless retreat will only trade escalating bullying, concessions for safety will only lead to even more humiliating situations.” (党中央深刻认识到，面对来自外部的各种围堵、打压、捣乱、颠覆活动，必须发扬不信邪、不怕鬼的精神，同企图颠覆中国共产党领导和我国社会主义制度、企图迟滞甚至阻断中华民族伟大复兴进程的一切势力斗争到底，一味退让只能换来得寸进尺的霸凌，委曲求全只能招致更为屈辱的境况。) The message that China will not cave into external pressure is repeated in the section on the historical lessons the party has gained from its “century of struggle.”

As with other statements in the resolution, this passage can be read in two different ways. A literal interpretation would take it as reflecting the party's defiance, resolve, and unwillingness to seek compromise and accommodation with the U.S. (and its allies). Another plausible reading is that such stark language, in particular the evocation of “evil fallacies and ghosts” (bellicose language rarely used in the most important official party documents), may belie the widespread unease and questioning among the party's rank and file about the consequences of the Sino-American confrontation. However, as the document almost certainly embodies Xi's thinking, we should be prepared for a continuation of China's uncompromising stance on a wide range of foreign-policy issues.

Conclusion

When the third resolution on party history was unveiled in November 2021, it was received as an attempt by Xi Jinping to rewrite party history. However, our close analysis of this historic document suggests that, while it engages in historical revisionism, it is mainly a document that affirms Xi's contributions to the party, and thus endorses his continuing leadership beyond the two terms to which his two immediate predecessors were subject. In terms of historical revisionism, the document's sin is one of omission. It underplays the disasters the party experienced under Mao's rule and gives short shrift to the tremendous successes the party scored during the reform era that preceded Xi's “new era.”¹¹ In terms of genealogy, the CCP's third resolution on history closely resembles its first resolution passed under Mao's aegis and shares few substantive similarities with the second resolution passed at the beginning of the reform era. The third resolution's primary objective is to create a compelling political and ideological case for extending Xi's tenure in office (the timing of the release of the document, which is one year before the party's 20th National Congress that will select a new leadership team, is no

¹¹ In his speech to the Central Committee plenum in November 2021, Xi explains that the resolution does not dwell on the post-Mao reform era because “the party had produced serious summaries” of the achievements and experience of the party on the 20th and 30th anniversary of reform and opening.” “习近平关于《中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议》的说明。” This explanation may be met with skepticism within the party because a resolution on the party's history approved by the Central Committee is a far more consequential document than speeches given by top leaders marking the key anniversaries of reform and opening.

coincidence). Consequently, the drafters of the resolution crafted its language to elevate Xi's stature. If we take seriously the appearances of names of leaders and key phrases and designations (such as "core leader"), it is apparent that the authors of the document intend to elevate Xi's stature above that of Deng and possibly even that of Mao.

Besides elevating his political stature, the new resolution resoundingly affirms Xi's policies since 2013. Even though such affirmation is intended to strengthen Xi's case for reappointment, it is likely to indicate a continuation of these policies during his third term.

But we should not take this document at face value. A plausible explanation for a vigorous affirmation of Xi's policies, effusive praise of his leadership, and elevation of his stature through linguistic devices may belie considerable skepticism and concerns within the party about Xi's leadership, policies, and intention to break with norms on term limits (although it is impossible to know their exact extent). Instead of signaling his political supremacy and the unity of the party, the resolution likely reveals latent tensions and fissures inside the party. The challenge facing Xi in the coming years will be to convince those concerned about his leadership that he will continue to be the right man to lead the party and his policies need not to be changed, even as China enters a period of sustained economic slowdown and rising tensions with the West.

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