

FEATURE

A Summary of Xi's Party Congress Speech

Your five-minute summary of Xi Jinping's three-hour Communist Party congress speech

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The 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party—the most important political event in China—kicked off today (Oct. 18) with a marathon speech of three-and-a-half hours by China's president and party chief, Xi Jinping.

Already the most dominant Chinese leader in decades, Xi is expected to further consolidate his power at the weeklong leadership reshuffle event, held every five years. His speech outlines China's policy direction in all major fields until the next congress, or even longer. But it was so tortuously long that many of his points may have been lost on the audience—including party elders who kept checking their watches.

We've watched the entire session and whittled it down to these three most important takeaways:

Dreamer Xi set a timetable for China's ultimate economic goal

Xi said the theme of this year's congress is to never forget the party's founding purpose,

which now includes the realization of “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”—also known as the “Chinese Dream”—a catchphrase he put forward shortly after taking power five years ago.



Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the 19th Party Congress held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2017. (Ng Han Guan / Associated Press)

To fulfill this great dream, Xi has inherited two lofty economic targets set by the party's previous leadership together known as “two centennial goals.” The first centennial goal is to build a “moderately prosperous society” by wiping out poverty by 2021, the 100th anniversary of the party's founding. The second and more challenging goal is to turn China into a “fully developed nation” by 2049, the

100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

In his speech, Xi for the first time outlined a specific timetable for reaching the second centennial goal. He said the party will first lead China to “basically realize socialist modernization” by 2035, when, among other things, the nation will have narrowed its wealth gap and improved its environment significantly. And the second stage will last from 2035 to 2050,

during which China will become a leading global power and the Chinese people will basically enjoy “common property.” By then, Xi said, “the Chinese nation will stand with a more high-spirited image in the family of nations.”

Theorist Xi put his stamp on the party’s forward guidance

Although the congress report is traditionally a reflection of common policy ground reached by senior party leaders, and not one man’s view, Xi appears to have successfully put his stamp on his work report. He repeatedly used his own buzz terms to summarize the party’s ideological work, including the catchy “four comprehensives,” and “scrape the poison off the bone.” (No, you don’t need to know what these are. Okay, fine, the second one refers to fighting corruption, a hallmark of Xi’s time at the top.)

Prominently, Xi rolled out his thinking for the country in the years to come. It’s called “Thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era,” which takes a well-worn phrase and tacks a few extra words on it to make it his own. Xi explained the notion in 14 bullet points that basically say “the party leads everything, everywhere,” as he noted in the first point. The bullet points cover everything from national security to elder care to reform, which includes “the determination to get rid of all outdated thinking and ideas and all institutional ailments.”

Speculation has been rife in the run-up to the congress that Xi will attach his own name to a signature policy to be enshrined in the party constitution to sum up his legacy. The party will amend the constitution during the session, which ends next week. The phrase “Thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” appears to be the term they’ll amend with. Backing up his claim of a “new era,” Xi declared that “the principal contradiction” facing China’s socialist society has evolved. For the past decades, the contradiction has always been between “the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and backward social

production.” Now, it is between “unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life,” Xi said.

It appears that China’s politics textbooks will go through an overhaul.

Globalist Xi says China’s political system can be a model for the world

Ever since positioning himself as a defender of globalization during his big speech at the Davos economic meeting earlier this year, Xi has led—or at least angled to lead—China in taking a more assertive role on issues including trade and climate change. And in fact, Xi stated early on in his speech that China is now “taking a driving seat” when it comes to fighting climate change.

But Xi also said China’s political model can make a contribution to the world. He said the political system of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is “a new choice” for other developing nations seeking to grow economically while maintaining their independence.

The party has always said China will never copy the political systems of other countries—the western notion of democracy in particular—although Xi did say in his speech that China should learn from other civilizations. Conversely, Xi seems to be suggesting that if other countries want to look to China for inspiration, they should feel free.

If after this taste, you absolutely want more, you can watch the entire thing yourself at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=32&v=wEn8AZqAAf4