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Beijing says Zero-Covid reversal was the right move at the right time. In reality, the abrupt U-turn--a result of a policymaking process driven by one person--has thrust China into a new public-health emergency. with @JChengWSJ @WSJ China team

<https://t.co/a2Ep0RxE4q> via @WSJ

By the end of the Oct Party Congress, it was already growing harder for Xi Jinping to argue that his zero-Covid policy was working. Reports were flowing into Zhongnanhai of rising infections nationwide, a surge taking place despite the strict lockdowns ...

Zero Covid had come at a high cost, hurting the economy, draining local finances and driving people to frustration. But as late as mid-November, he was wavering on whether and how to unwind a policy with which he had so closely associated himself ...

A rare wave of protests in China's largest cities in late November, coupled with urgent pleas from many corners of the government, finally prodded Xi to shift ...

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-protests-spread-over-governments-covid-restrictions-11669516403>

China's ruling party has long taken pride in its long-term planning and crisis management. Over the past decades, decisions have been made by a small number of leaders reaching consensus after rounds of internal deliberations. Xi has increasingly curtailed policy debate and ...

...sidelined anyone raising public doubts about the zero-Covid strategy. "As with other man-made disasters in China's history, political loyalty to the core leader now means no dissent, no collective decision-making and a lack of debate and discussion within the party," @MaryGao

China has also shunned foreign advice, a shift from before. During the global financial crisis in 2008, senior Chinese officials sought out American experts for consultation. This time around, when the WHO said in May Zero Covid was unsustainable, China fired back.

My fav story from the GFC era: Wang Yang, a senior party official who was then Guangdong, hard hit by the financial crisis, turned to the World Bank's office in Beijing for advice. After @davidrdollar, the World Bank representative at the time, and his team wrote up a policy ...

...recommendation, Wang then invited @davidrdollar to give a lecture to the provincial government which was attended by hundreds of officials, with Wang in the middle of the front row. (Not surprisingly, officials like Wang are no longer at the top echelon of power)

In the party's version of events, the decision to end Zero Covid was optimally timed. "The timing is right and the basic conditions are met," Li Qiang, Xi's handpicked next premier, said at a Dec. 25 nationwide teleconference.