

What They Did on Their Summer Vacation

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As some members of the Xi Jinping leadership retreated to the seaside summer resort at Beidaihe, several events and trends converged in anticipation of a Central Committee plenum later this fall. These include the waning stages of the mass line campaign to improve party work style, a series of takedowns of high-level leaders in the campaign against party corruption, and the celebration of the 110th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's birth. Taken together, they point to a coordinated drive to press comprehensive reforms that were mandated when the Xi leadership took power in 2012 and that were elaborated in November 2013.

Beidaihe

As they had in 2013, PRC official media mentioned beforehand that there would be a leadership retreat at Beidaihe. Xi Jinping and other members of the Politburo Standing Committee stopped appearing in public on Saturday 1 August and re-emerged on Friday 14 August, when Xi Jinping appeared to attend the Summer Youth Olympics in Nanjing. The only exception among Politburo Standing Committee members across that period was Premier Li Keqiang, who inspected earthquake disaster relief in Yunnan on 4–6 August.

Attendance by Beijing-based regular members of the Politburo was, however, less consistent, as some appeared in Beijing or elsewhere across the period. Vice Premier Liu Yandong, for example, appeared in Inner Mongolia on the 3rd, and Vice Premier Wang Yang appeared at a drought-relief meeting in Beijing on the 6th.

It is also clear that none of the six regionally based members of the Politburo attended the retreat, as all showed up regularly in their home bailiwicks or elsewhere across this period. For example, party chief Han Zheng appeared in Shanghai on 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, and 14 August. Guangdong party chief Hu Chunhua appeared in Canton on 3, 5, 7, 12, 13, and 14 August. Xinjiang party boss Zhang Chunxian appeared in Urumchi on 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 August. Both Tianjin party chief Sun Chunlan and Beijing party boss Guo Jinlong appeared less frequently, though still in their home capitals or elsewhere.

This year's Beidaihe retreat was thus a limited affair, closely resembling the one in August 2013, when there was a similar pattern of leadership appearances. In both years, the PRC news service China News Agency (中国通讯社) indicated that a Beidaihe retreat would take place. In these respects, both years' retreats differed from the Hu Jintao era, when full-scale Politburo retreats at Beidaihe were discontinued. In the Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin eras, Beidaihe became effectively a summer capital and a major Central Committee office was set up there to manage the leadership's business while leaders cooled their feet in the ocean and discussed issues of the day and priorities for the coming year. In 2003, the new Hu leadership dismantled the summer office, and

although some leaders and their families may well have taken vacations at Beidaihe, leadership appearances showed that there was no large-scale leadership retreat in those years. The retreats that the full Politburo Standing Committee and some regular Politburo members under Xi Jinping have taken in 2013 and 2014 thus appear to be a partial restoration of the practices of the period before Hu Jintao.¹

In all years since 2001, whether there was a larger leadership retreat at Beijing or not, the executive secretary of the party Secretariat and, often, the vice premier or state councilor in charge of education have met scientists, educators, and model workers vacationing at Beidaihe for a few days as a reward for meritorious service. Liu Yunshan's meeting with this year's contingent in Beidaihe on 6 August thus followed this longstanding practice.

PRC official media gave little indication beforehand of what the agenda of leadership discussions at Beidaihe might be. The 30 July China News Agency article that mentioned the upcoming Beidaihe retreat stated the leadership's attention would focus on the economy and economic policy in the second half of the year and on the 18th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum, which the Politburo the day before had scheduled for October. The article went on to note that the 29 July announcement by the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) of an investigation into violations of party discipline by former Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang suggested that the Xi leadership "had reached a consensus" on the Zhou case, allowing the Beidaihe retreat to focus on the economy and the Fourth Plenum. PRC media since the retreat have given no explicit account of what the leadership discussed there.

The Mass Line Campaign²

In mid-August, the Xi leadership announced that the second stage of 18-month "mass line education and practice activities" had reached the phase of "rectification and formulating work rules" and would soon—presumably in late September or early October—conclude altogether with the final phase of "summing up." On 5 September, Xinhua cited the Politburo Standing Committee membership urging that the "criticism/self criticism" activities associated with the effort to improve the party's work style and its image among the public continue as a "normal" routine, though the campaign would conclude according to schedule.

The campaign was mandated explicitly in the Central Committee work report delivered by outgoing party General Secretary Hu Jintao at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. On 4 December 2012, the Politburo discussed and approved a ban on eight official abuses as a way to improve the party's work style and "link the Party closely to the masses." These priorities became the focus of the campaign when the Politburo authorized its launch on 19 April 2013. On 21 May 2013, Politburo Standing Committee member and Secretariat executive secretary Liu Yunshan convened the inaugural meeting of the Central Party Mass Line Education and Practice Activities Leading Small Group (中央党的群众路线教育实践活动领导小组). The campaign was formally launched on 18 June when a "work conference on conducting the party's mass line education and implementation activities" convened in Beijing, presided over by Liu Yunshan and addressed by Xi Jinping.

The Politburo itself led the way in launching the campaign in a four-day “special meeting” (专门会议) on 22–25 June 2013. In cascading fashion, the campaign proceeded into central organs beneath the Politburo and to the provinces. On 27 June, Xinhua reported that all 31 province-level party committees would convene campaign mobilization meetings in early July. On 7–8 July 2013, the Central Military Commission held a “democratic life meeting” (民主生活会) to address an agenda paralleling the Politburo’s. (Xinhua, 8 July 2013) On 10 July, central media reported the dispatch of 45 inspection teams to an initial group of 259 State Council ministries, state-owned enterprises, and provinces to monitor their progress in carrying out the campaign. On 12 July, Xinhua reported the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee leaving the capital to inspect the conduct of the campaign personally.

The second stage of the campaign began on 20 January 2014 at a meeting in Beijing presided over by Liu Yunshan and addressed by Xi Jinping. After summing up the progress of the first stage, which had been conducted in central and province-level party units, the campaign moved on in its second stage to sub-provincial units. Similar procedures, including personal inspections of the campaign in selected county-level party bodies by the seven Politburo Standing Committee members, began immediately after the Spring Festival in early February. The campaign’s final phase also saw new inspections by the Standing Committee seven in designated counties in August.

The course of the campaign was typical of the carefully circumscribed intra-party campaigns of the post-Mao period to promote party solidarity ideologically and politically and to improve the party’s work style. In contrast to the campaigns of the Mao era, which were called mass “movements” (运动) and typically involved significant mobilization of broader society, the political campaigns in the post-Mao period have been called intra-party “activities” (活动) or “education” (教育). Thus the scope and nomenclature of the current mass line campaign—strictly translated, the “party mass line education and implementation activities” (党的群众路线教育实践活动)—comport with the 2009–2010 “activities to study and implement the scientific development concept” (学习实践科学发展观活动) and the 2005–2006 “all-party education activities to develop and preserve the advanced character of communist party members (全党开展保持共产党员先进性教育活动).

In addition, the mechanics of the mass line paralleled those of intra-party campaigns in the last two decades. For example, the 2008–2009 campaign to study the “scientific development concept” had been explicitly mandated in Hu Jintao’s work report to the 17th CCP Congress in October 2007. The Politburo authorized the launch of the campaign on 5 September 2008, and a five-day conference shortly thereafter laid out the campaign’s goals and procedures. A campaign leading small group was established under the leadership of Xi Jinping—who, as executive secretary of the Secretariat, was in charge of managing the party apparatus, as Liu Yunshan is today—to run the campaign. The campaign proceeded from party units at central institutions through provincial bodies to grassroots levels over an 18-month period. Its object was to “study and investigate” the “scientific development concept,” to deploy “democratic life meetings” to inspect

adherence to the concept throughout the party and gain insight from “the masses,” and to bring about “rectification, improvement and implementation” on the basis of the concept. The Politburo Standing Committee itself kicked off the campaign with its own “criticism and self-criticism in a “democratic life meeting” reported to the full Politburo on 23 January 2009, and the Central Military Commission followed suit on 1 February 2009. Thereafter, Xinhua reported Politburo Standing Committee members fanning out to inspect the progress of the campaign in central organs and the provinces.

The Anti-Corruption Drive

The campaign against corruption came to a crescendo over the course of the summer with the announcement of three high-level corruption investigations. On 30 June, Xinhua reported that a Politburo meeting that day had decided to expel Xu Caihou, formerly vice chairman of the party and state Central Military Commission and at the time one of the two highest-ranking officers of the PLA, from the party and to turn him over for criminal prosecution. Two *People's Daily* Commentator Articles celebrated Xu's cashiering and pointed up its implications for the Xi leadership's campaign against corruption.

Xinhua's report revealed that the formal investigation of Xu had begun the previous 15 March. Xu last appeared in public at 2013 national day festivities, as noted by the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Wen Wei Po* but not by official PRC media in Beijing. Xu had frequently been rumored to be under a cloud since his retirement from the party leadership in November 2012 and from his state military post on March 2013—largely in connection with the corruption investigation of General Gu Junshan, formerly deputy director of the PLA General Logistics Department. Gu's expulsion from the party and prosecution for corruption was reported by Xinhua on 31 March 2014, two weeks after the investigation of Xu Caihou began.

A month later, on 29 July, Xinhua reported that the “Central Committee” authorized an “examination” (审查) of Zhou Yongkang, formerly a Politburo Standing Committee member, for “suspected ‘serious disciplinary violations.’” The decision was undoubtedly made at a Politburo meeting that day, though the terse announcement of the decision did not say so explicitly. Xinhua's reporting on the meeting stated only that it conducted the mid-year review of economic policy, scheduled the 18th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum to meet in October, and addressed “other matters.” Three *People's Daily* Commentator Articles—on 30 and 31 July and 1 August—addressed the implications of the Zhou case.

Finally, on 1 September, Xinhua reported the replacement of Shanxi party chief Yuan Chunping by Jilin party boss Wang Rulin. The change at the top of the Shanxi party apparatus was preceded on 28 and 29 August by Xinhua announcements of corruption investigations against four ranking party leaders in the province, the latest in a long and widening series of investigations among lower-ranking officials there. The changes in party leadership in Shanxi were likely decided at a Politburo meeting on 29 August, though Xinhua's account of that meeting did not say so. Following past practice when provincial party chiefs have been removed for misbehavior, Liu Yunshan, the Politburo Standing Committee member who manages the party apparatus, and party Organization

Department Director Zhao Leji presided over Wang's installation as the new party chief in Taiyuan on the first.³

With the leadership changes in late August, the corruption investigations in Shanxi took down four of 14 serving members of the provincial party committee and two of seven vice governors. Yuan Chunqing, the top party leader, was not removed himself on charges of corruption but rather, as later commentary reported, for his failure to deal effectively with the corruption flourishing under his administration. In remarks at the Taiyuan meeting on the 1st, Liu Yunshan praised the province's economic development under Yuan but also noted the "grim" level of corruption in Shanxi. Without apparent intended irony, the party's flagship journal *Seeking Truth* (求是) published on 1 September—the day Yuan was removed in Shanxi—a long article authored by Yuan on studying Xi Jinping's "important expositions" on curbing corruption and stressing the importance of party committee leadership in the struggle.⁴ Yuan, according to subsequent commentary on the transition in Taiyuan, has been transferred to work in Zhongnanhai as deputy director of the party's Rural Work Leading Small Group.

Each of the three high-level cases is the culmination of long lower-level investigations since the anti-corruption campaign began in late 2012. The case against Xu Caihou, as noted above, built on earlier investigations into charges of taking bribes for officer promotions in the PLA against Gu Junshan and other crimes. The case against Zhou Yongkang grew out of a year-long series of investigations into his cronies in the China National Petroleum Corporation, in Chengdu from his time as Sichuan party chief, in the public security apparatus, secretaries in his personal staff over his career, and his family. The purge of the Shanxi party leadership pyramided up from a score of corruption cases in the province since early 2014.

Whether the campaign will set its sights on new high-level targets is as yet unclear. The CDIC website continues to announce investigations in party, state, and provincial bodies at a blistering pace, without visible letup. Since the beginning of 2014, Shanxi and Sichuan ranked high in listings of CDIC investigations, but several others—Shaanxi, Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi in particular—have not lagged far behind, while Hubei appears nearly to have doubled the number of those under way in Taiyuan and Chengdu. It seems likely, therefore, that the campaign will continue to expose new cases, though perhaps not at the top levels exposed in the Xu, Zhou, and Shanxi cases.

The announcement of the Xu, Zhou, and Shanxi cases seems orchestrated as a crescendo in the campaign heading onto the October plenum slated to address party discipline and rule by law. Taken together, the three cases seem intended to underscore the universality of the campaign against party corruption by striking at three critical sectors: the central party apparatus, the PLA, and party leadership at the provincial level. Also, the dispatch of CDIC investigation teams to all 31 of China's province-level units—a process that has proceeded in four stages since May 2013—was completed in July with the dispatch of teams to a final group of 10 provinces, suggesting that investigations at that level will wind up this fall.

In addition, a central theme in the anti-corruption campaign has been the need to institutionalize party disciplinary processes more effectively to root out corruption and eliminate the soil in which it flourishes. Since the spring, the leadership has taken several steps toward that goal:

- In May and June, the leadership announced plans to reinforce the authority of discipline inspection organs by having them report not only to the party committees at their respective levels but also to the disciplinary authorities at the next level up.
- At the end of June, the party General Office announced a five-year party-wide grassroots training program. Building on the themes of the nearly completed mass line campaign, the program will focus on maintaining party spirit, eliminating “undesirable work styles,” and sustaining party relations with the people.
- On 29 August, the Politburo endorsed a “Plan for Implementing the Deepening Reform of the Party-Building System,” addressing one of the six major sectors laid out in the Third Plenum’s 60-point decision for “comprehensive reform” in November 2013. The plan encompasses changes for completion initially by 2017 (heading into the 18th Party Congress) and finally by 2020 (when the entire “comprehensive reform” is to be achieved).

The Central Committee plenum will likely endorse these steps. It will also likely affirm the expulsion of Xu Caihou from the party, as well as fill the vacancies left by Central Committee members and alternates already removed by the anti-corruption drive. It will also endorse the expulsion from the party of Zhou Yongkang if the Politburo takes that action, as probable, before the plenum. As some commentary in official media has pointed out, the 29 July Xinhua report describes the leadership’s decision to “examine” the Zhou case, rather than employing the more usual terminology to “investigate” (调查), and the report fails to refer to “Comrade” Zhou Yongkang, suggesting that the case is already well in hand. The timing of the announcement on the eve of the Beidaihe retreat, moreover, suggests an initial consensus in the Politburo leadership about it.⁵ Action to expel Zhou and to turn his case over to state authorities for criminal prosecution would presumably have taken place at the Politburo meeting on 30 September that also set the final date of the plenum, though Xinhua’s account of that meeting did not mention it.

The Deng Xiaoping Anniversary

The Xi leadership meanwhile has continued to press its reformist intentions, most prominently in the celebrations marking the 110th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping’s birth on 20 August. Formally, the celebrations paralleled those marking the 110th anniversary of Mao Zedong’s birth in December 2003. Hu Jintao presided over a symposium to mark Mao’s birth that was attended by the entire Politburo leadership and other high-level party, PLA, and state leaders and delivered a long speech commemorating Mao and his contributions to the communist revolution and to the PRC. Similarly, Xi Jinping presided over a symposium attended by the leadership and delivered a long address on Deng Xiaoping’s contributions to China and the CCP.

Much of the commentary and other aspects of the Deng commemoration, however, were devoted to the particular parallel of Deng’s stalwart leadership of the reform movement

that began the PRC's transformation in the late 1970s with the struggle to implement "comprehensive reforms" undertaken by the Xi Jinping leadership now. A 48-episode television docudrama on Deng's life began airing on 27 August, focusing in particular on Deng's struggle to launch the reform movement against entrenched opposition in the years 1976–1984. Similarly, in a long interview in the Beijing city newspaper *Xinjing Bao* on 20 August, the former deputy editor of *People's Daily* Zhou Ruijin compared the effort to advance the 2013 Third Plenum reforms with Deng's struggle on the late 1970s and early 1980s, urging, "we should use Deng Xiaoping's reform legacy to continue pushing forward today's reform." In launching Deng's reform, Zhou observed, the primary obstacle" was "breaking free from leftist ideological shackles" and "liberating thought" to advance reform. The main obstacle today, Zhou went on, is the problem of "breaking free from entrenched interests" and so is even more difficult.

Implications

The convergence of the mass line campaign's final days, the spectacular crescendo in the campaign against party corruption, and the renewed stress on the Xi leadership's struggle against entrenched resistance appears orchestrated to enhance the focus on party discipline and rule by law heading into the Fourth Plenum in October and to advance the program of reforms set forth at the Third Plenum in November 2013. Regime commentary has persistently stressed from the beginning that the mass line and anti-corruption campaigns are intended to complement the effort at renewed reform under Xi Jinping.⁶ Recent leadership statements and commentary continue to drive this point home. For example:

- Yu Zhengsheng, a Politburo Standing Committee member and chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (the PRC's umbrella united front body), observed in a meeting of the latter body's standing committee on 25 August that the "new atmosphere" created by the party's mass line and corruption drives has lent "a great positive energy" to promote reform. (Xinhua, 25 August 2014)
- In his 20 August *Xinjing Bao* interview, Zhou Ruijin attacked "special interest groups" as "the greatest obstacle to reform." "Power elites who control public power," he went on, "collude with elites in the capital to form special interest blocs." "When power, capital, and resources combine, they readily foster corruption, enabling cronies to monopolize the fruits of economic growth and infringe on the interests of ordinary citizens." The "special interest groups represented by Zhou Yongkang and Xu Caihou," Zhou noted, are "typical" of such "crony interest groups" that impede reform.
- A Xinhua insight piece transmitted on 19 August and entitled "To Reignite a Nation, Xi Carries Deng's Torch" declared that "China is fully immersed in perhaps the boldest set of economic and social reforms ever." "The CCP's war against corruption and pursuit of major figures previously considered untouchable, including Zhou Yongkang, are a crucial part of the big picture," it noted.

The analysis here of recent trends in the mass line and anti-corruption campaigns sheds different light on the motivations of the Xi leadership than what has frequently been the focus among many observers: Xi Jinping's consolidation of personal power. There is no

question that Xi—and the group of leaders in the Politburo Standing Committee over whom he presides—has gained power as a consequence of the intra-party campaigns. That certainly has been the point. But the enhancement of their collective power and that of Xi in particular has served a broader policy purpose that stymied the previous Hu Jintao leadership: comprehensive reform in a time of perceived crisis in sustaining the party's governance of China.

Analysis that interprets the leadership's motivations simply as personal aggrandizement misses the larger picture of what the Xi leadership has been up to. Policy objectives, as much as or even more than narrower concerns of personal power, go a long way to filling in a picture of a leadership working under a mandate bestowed at the 18th Party Congress to strengthen itself to wage a struggle against “vested interests” and implement what are intended as transformative reforms.⁷

Notes

¹ As a token of the marginal enhancements in transparency in leadership affairs, the English-language newspaper *China Daily* on 26 August carried a long account of Beidaihe as a resort town and the leadership's evolving summer activities there.

² The term 活动 in the name of this party-wide movement should be rendered strictly as “activities.” Nevertheless, “campaign” is used throughout to conform to conventional English-language usage. On the implications of the different Chinese terms, see “The Road to the Third Plenum,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 42 (7 October 2013).

³ In each of the cases of Beijing party chief Chen Xitong in 1995, Shanghai party chief Chen Liangyu in 2006, and Chongqing party boss Bo Xilai in 2012, the executive secretary of the party Secretariat or the party Organization Department director (or both) personally presided over the transfer of provincial leadership.

⁴ “切实落实主体责任, 旗帜鲜明反对腐败—认真学习贯彻习近平总书记关于党风廉政建设的重要论述” (Earnestly Fulfill Principal Duties and with Bright Banners Oppose Corruption—Conscientiously Study and Implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Expositions on Building Party Workstyle and Clean Government), *Seeking Truth*, 2014 No.17 (1 September).

⁵ China News Agency, 29 and 30 July 2014.

⁶ See “The Road to the Third Plenum,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 42 (7 October 2013) for an assessment as these campaigns were beginning.

⁷ On this point, see “How Strong Is Xi Jinping?” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 43 (13 March 2014).