

## Beijing Prepares to Convene the 17th Party Congress

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A meeting of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo at the end of August scheduled the convocation of the party Central Committee's Seventh Plenum and proposed a date for the opening of the Party's 17th National Congress later this fall. Preparations for Party congresses preoccupy the top Party leadership and inevitably heat up the political atmosphere in Beijing more than a year ahead of time. Judging by available indications, preparations for this congress have gone relatively smoothly. This article offers a number of inferences from the PRC media treatment of the upcoming congress about what themes the congress will address and about what changes in the leadership may emerge from the congress.

### Why Party Congresses Are Important

National Party congresses, which convene every five years by stipulation of the CCP's constitution, are the most authoritative public events in Chinese politics. They address two principal tasks. First, a Party congress reviews a report delivered by the Party's top leader, the general secretary, that sums up the work of the Party's Central Committee in the five-year period since the preceding Party congress and sets forth priorities in the Party's work for the five years ahead. Second, the congress elects a new Central Committee, a body of roughly 200 members who have the authority to act in the name of the Party congress in the intervening years. A Party congress may also adopt revisions to the Party constitution.

The day after a Party congress closes, the newly elected Central Committee convenes its first plenum to appoint a new top Party leadership for the five-year term until the next Party congress. These appointments include the post of general secretary and the membership of the Politburo and its Standing Committee (the Party's decision-making bodies), of the Party Secretariat (which oversees coordination and implementation of leadership decisions), of the Party's Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC), and of the Party's Central Military Commission (CMC). Complementing these appointments in the CCP, new leadership appointments in the institutions of the PRC state are made at the National People's Congress (NPC) the following spring—in this case, the 11th NPC, which will convene in March 2008. Appointments made in both the Party and state hierarchies are not normally altogether new and include significant holdovers from the previous term.

## Scheduling the 17th Party Congress

With considerable media fanfare, Beijing announced the completion of the process of selecting delegates to the 17th Party Congress on 2 August, when the official Xinhua News Agency published a list of 2,217 delegates selected from among 38 sectors of the Party: the 31 provinces plus a delegation of mainland Taiwanese; the Central Committee apparatus, the State Council and NPC system; the PLA; and state-owned and other enterprises. A 3 August Xinhua interview with a Party Organization Department spokesman described new, more elaborate selection procedures that had been adopted to make the process more “democratic.”

Then, on 28 August, according to Xinhua, the Politburo scheduled the Central Committee’s Seventh Plenum to convene on 9 October and proposed that the plenum set the 17th CCP Congress to convene on 15 October. Party congresses last a week, and so the congress would close on or around 21 October, and the first plenum of the new Central Committee elected at the congress would open on the 22nd or thereabouts. PRC media did not routinely report on meetings of the Politburo in the period before the 2002 16th CCP Congress, but on 25 August 2002 Xinhua reported that a “recent” Politburo had proposed that that congress open on 8 November 2002, pending approval by a Central Committee plenum. That the 17th Party Congress is scheduled to meet nearly a month earlier in the year than the 16th had done suggests that preparations for the upcoming congress have gone more smoothly than those for the preceding one.

Since the 28 August Politburo meeting, Xinhua reported another Politburo meeting, held on 17 September, that endorsed the draft work report to be delivered at the congress by Hu Jintao—revised to accommodate further comments from reviewers “inside and outside the party”—and that proposed amendments to the CCP constitution for approval by the forthcoming Seventh Plenum.

## Beidaihe Meeting?

The Politburo’s scheduling of the 16th Party Congress in 2002 had been preceded by intensive leadership discussions at its annual retreat at the seaside resort Beidaihe, which, judging by public appearances of top leaders, apparently convened on 6–12 August 2002.<sup>1</sup> The 2002 Beidaihe meeting continued the nearly annual practice begun in 1953 of the senior Party leadership retiring to Beidaihe for relaxed discussions of the coming year’s issues.

In 2003, however, the new Party leadership under General Secretary Hu Jintao officially ended the annual leadership retreat to Beidaihe, pronouncing it not in keeping with the “people-centered” policies promoted by Hu and opening the resort to broader use as a place for the regime to reward model workers and other professional groups for their service and to tourism. In the ensuing years, Xinhua reported various groups—such as SARS workers in 2003—being feted at Beidaihe and being greeted by members of the

Politburo and state leadership who preside over the policy sector within which the respective groups worked.

This practice has continued this year. On 4 August, Xinhua reported Politburo member He Guoqiang and PRC State Councilor for education affairs Chen Zhili meeting in Beidaihe with 60 model teachers who were vacationing there under Party sponsorship on 3–9 August. On 7 August, Xinhua reported Wang Zhaoguo, the Politburo member responsible for trade union work, meeting with model workers in Beidaihe. On the 10th, Supreme People’s Court President Xiao Yang feted “heroic models in the court system.”

Some independent Hong Kong–based and foreign observers have inferred, however, that the Hu leadership broke its own precedent and met in Beidaihe—variously in July and August—to discuss preparations for the upcoming Party congress. While there is no conclusive proof either way, the evidence in support of this inference is not strong. In the years before 2003, evidence for an ongoing leadership retreat included Xinhua reports of top leaders appearing in Beidaihe. These included reports of top leaders—the general secretary and the PRC premier—receiving foreign guests at Beidaihe, frequently with a Xinhua comment that the leaders were in the seaside resort for their annual retreat. This year, there have been no such reports.

In addition, there have been two recent accounts of activities at Beidaihe in the press that underscore the changes at the resort since 2003.

- A 5 August article in the PRC-controlled Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po*, datelined 4 August and written by a Beijing-based reporter of the paper, recalled that Beidaihe was “formerly an important site for policy discussions” but now is “a seaside holiday destination” for “successful figures from all walks of life in Beijing.” Where previously one could observe official “Red Flag” (Hongqi) sedans dominating traffic at Beidaihe, now one sees the “Chinese-made Audis, Fords, and Mercedes” preferred by China’s rising business class. The reporter recounted tailing one of several Audis on the route from Beijing and walking past the well-guarded Rest House for Units Subordinate to the Central Committee at the time when the 60 model teachers were staying there.
- An article in the 30 August edition of the Canton newspaper *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) narrated the history of Beidaihe as a resort town since the 1930s and its use by the CCP leadership from 1953 to 2003. Noting the impact of the 2003 ban on its use as a resort for leadership retreats, the article observed that “although the 17th Party Congress is drawing near, the atmosphere in Beidaihe is nevertheless relaxed.” The article took note that some areas are still cordoned off as official sites, but it also recounted efforts to build up the resort as a tourist attraction.

That the top leadership did withdraw in early August for intensive discussions of the upcoming Party congress is clear. Hu Jintao was out of public view for a 12-day stretch from 2 August until the 14th, when he left to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Premier Wen Jiabao was out of public view 2–7 August, made a public appearance on the 8th, and was out of view again until

the 14th. Zeng Qinghong, who is the fifth-ranked member of the Politburo Standing Committee and, as executive secretary of the Secretariat, a key participant in discussions on policy and personnel questions to be addressed at the Party congress, made no public appearances 2–7 August before departing on the 8th for four days in Hohhot to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Among the remaining members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the only public appearance in the 2–14 August period was by Li Changchun, who appeared at Beijing University on the 10th.

The leadership meeting in early August was not likely to have been a full session of the Politburo. Appearances by Beijing-based members of the Politburo through this period dropped in frequency but did not end altogether, as was the case for Politburo Standing Committee members for much of the period. As noted above, He Guoqiang and Wang Zhaoguo appeared in Beidaihe on the 4th and 7th respectively, and Zeng Peiyan appeared in Qinhuangdao on the 10th. Meanwhile, Politburo members based outside the capital—including Guangdong Party chief Zhang Dejiang, Hubei Party chief Yu Zhengsheng, and Xinjiang Party boss Wang Lequan—all continued to appear in their provincial capitals.

The most likely conclusion is that the Politburo Standing Committee met intensively for the five-day period from 3 to 7 August in Beijing, not Beidaihe, to discuss issues connected with scheduling the Seventh Plenum and the Party congress. These issues would have included reviewing the latest draft of the work report that Hu will deliver at the Party congress and working over lists of nominees for the new Central Committee and for the top leadership. Having established a general consensus on these issues, the Standing Committee then referred its decisions for endorsement by the full Politburo on 28 August, which announced the dates for the upcoming plenum and Party congress.

## Hu's Work Report to the Congress

Judging by past practice, the draft work report that Hu Jintao will deliver at the 17th Congress will have been through five or six iterations since work began on composing it late last year and will have been reviewed broadly in the Party down through the provincial and municipal levels by the time it is presented to the Seventh Plenum on 9 October. The Politburo Standing Committee will have reviewed it at least three times and the full Politburo more than once. In scope, the Hu report will likely survey and offer authoritative guidelines on the entire range of Party affairs and policy. Its format will likely follow the long-established pattern of work reports at past congresses and resemble that of Jiang Zemin's work report to the 16th CCP Congress in 2002, as detailed in the box below.

*Structure of the 16th Congress Report*

- Introduction
- The Work of the Past 5 and 13 Years
- The Important Thinking of the “3 Represents”
- Building a Well-Off Society
- Economic Development & Reform
- Political Development & Reform
- Cultural Development & Reform
- National Defense and Army Building
- “One Country Two Systems” and National Unification
- The International Situation & Foreign Work
- Party Building
- Closing

PRC media commentary has made it plain that Hu’s work report will focus on two complementary themes in particular: the “scientific development concept” (the assertion that China’s developmental policies must take into account not only economic growth but also their comprehensive social, environmental, and cultural consequences) and the goal of building a “socialist harmonious society” (the effort to create “a socialist society that is democratic and law-based, fair and just, trustworthy and friendly, full of vigor and vitality, secure and orderly, and in which man and nature are in harmony”). The former concept was raised first by Hu Jintao in September 2003 as part of the “people-centered” governance approach that Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao have advocated since the 2002 16th Congress, and was ratified by the Central Committee at its Third Plenum in October 2003. The “socialist harmonious society” theme was introduced by Hu in a speech to the Central Party School in February 2004 and endorsed in a long “Decision” adopted by the Sixth Plenum in October 2006.<sup>2</sup> When the 17th CCP Congress endorses Hu’s work report by resolution, the ideological themes that have emerged as hallmarks of the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao leadership since 2002 and the policy departures they entail will have received the Party’s most authoritative stamp.

As they did in the run-up to the 2002 16th Party Congress, commentators from the Central Party School—which Hu Jintao presided over for 10 years before becoming general secretary in 2002—have taken the lead in projecting what themes would be stressed in Hu’s work report to the 17th Congress. A long article in the 19 March issue of the current-affairs magazine *Liaowang* (Outlook) by Ye Duchu, often billed alternatively as a Party historian and Party constitutional expert at the Central Party School, asserted that the “scientific development concept” reflects the Party’s “new knowledge of economic and social development” and “a more comprehensive and profound scientific understanding . . . that conforms to the objective laws of development.” The goal of

building a “socialist harmonious society,” Ye continued, is “a grand proposition” that sums up the Party’s efforts across five decades—from the attempt in the 1950s to “handle contradictions of a different nature” in society to efforts in the present to “cope with the widening gap between rich and poor.” In an interview on 24 May in *Liaowang Dongfang Zhoukan* (Eastern Outlook Weekly), Ye predicted that these concepts would be authoritatively affirmed at the 17th Congress.

The most authoritative exposition of these themes on the eve of the 17th Congress, however, was by Hu himself in a speech at the Central Party School on 25 June. The speech continues the practice begun by former general secretary Jiang Zemin in June 1992, prior to the 14th CCP Congress, of previewing the congress’s ideological themes in a Central Party School address. Hu’s speech was immediately hailed in a series of eight *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily) commentator articles—an authoritative level of comment—that ran on consecutive days from 27 June through 4 July as “responding to a series of theoretical and practical questions about the future development of the Party and state, thereby laying down an important political, ideological, and theoretical foundation for the triumphant convening of the 17th Congress.” The speech also prompted a two-month study campaign that ended in late August and a second series of ten *People’s Daily* commentator articles that ran from 22 August through 2 September.

As Hu has done on previous occasions, in his 25 June speech he asserted the intrinsic continuity between the ideological and political themes introduced during his leadership since the 2002 16th Congress and the CCP’s authoritative line of promoting “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as established by the Deng Xiaoping in 1982 and developed through the Jiang Zemin era in the 1990s. Introducing a new formulation to sum up this continuity, Hu declared that the CCP must “uphold Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thinking of the ‘three represents’ as a guide, deepen implementation of the scientific development concept, continue liberation of thought, uphold reform and opening, push for scientific development, promote social harmony, and strive to win new victories in building a well-off society in an all-round way.” Hu specifically identified the latter four elements of this formulation: “liberating thought; reform and opening; scientific development and social harmony; and building a well-off society in an all-round way”—as four tasks that are “vitaly important” to the Party and country. These tasks have henceforth been referred to endlessly in PRC media as the “four steadfasts” (or, invariant translations, the “four unswervinglys” or “four unwaveringlys”—*sige jiandingbuyi* 四个坚定不移).

The import of Hu’s vigorous assertion of continuity between the “series of major strategic ideas put forward by the Central Committee since the 16th Congress” under his leadership and the Party’s ideological line set down by Deng Xiaoping and developed by Jiang Zemin was spelled out explicitly by Central Party School commentators immediately thereafter. In an interview published in *Wen Wei Po* on 5 July, Xie Chuntao, deputy director of the Central Party School’s Party History Division, stated:

At a time when the 17th Party Congress is about to open, certain erroneous viewpoints have appeared inside and outside the Party. A handful of

people, for example, take socialism with Chinese characteristics to be democratic socialism. Some refuse to affirm the policy of reform and opening and its achievements over the past 30 years. These erroneous views must be taken seriously. General Secretary Hu Jintao's speech indirectly criticizes these erroneous views and declares to the world: China in the future will not take the road of democratic socialism, still less will it take the road of capitalism; rather, it will take the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Similarly, Central Party School vice president Li Junru declared in a long article in the Party School newspaper, *Xuexi Shibao* (Study Times), that Hu's speech had affirmed "socialism with Chinese characteristics" because "the Soviet model of socialism is not our banner, neither is democratic socialism our banner." "The issue of 'what road to take' has once again become an issue of principle that we must handle seriously," Li continued. While the Party cannot afford to ignore problems that crop up in the advance of socialism, Li noted, "still less can we negate the reform objective of a socialist market economy . . . or negate the basic principles of scientific socialism and the Party's leadership in the name of developing democracy or opposing corruption." The "scientific development concept," Li concluded, provides the answers to "fundamental questions of 'why to develop,' 'what is development,' and 'how to develop.'"

The political significance of Hu's Central Party School speech on 25 June was thus to steer a middle path between persistent criticism of the Hu leadership's policies from the left—in favor of a more traditional brand of socialism—and more recent criticism from the right, in favor of steps toward European-style democratic socialism or outright democracy.<sup>3</sup> By asserting continuity in ideological line with Deng, the progenitor of China's reform era, and with Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin, and by pressing for endorsement by the 17th Congress of his leadership's initiatives since 2002, Hu is attempting to secure the middle ground in Chinese politics. From that vantage point, as Deng Xiaoping himself demonstrated through the 1980s, Hu affords himself the best means to rebut challenges from both the left and right.

## Revision of the Party Constitution

In addition to securing the Party congress's endorsement of the "scientific development concept" and "socialist harmonious society" themes in the work report that Hu will deliver, the Hu leadership will also seek revision of the Party constitution's preamble to incorporate at least the "scientific development concept" and perhaps the "socialist harmonious society" ideal. Xinhua's report on the 17 September Politburo meeting that approved a series of constitutional revisions to be proposed to the Party congress stated that the Politburo held that it is necessary to amend the Party constitution to "reflect the scientific development concept and other major theoretical developments" since the 2002 16th Party Congress.

In addition, there may be amendments that revise the Party constitution's provisions regarding cadre responsibilities and discipline. In a long review of past amendments to the Party constitution, Professor Ye Duchu of the Central Party School noted the adoption by the Hu leadership of several new regulations regarding cadre supervision, tenure in office, and restrictions on appointments. "Various signs indicate," Ye concluded, "that with the demands of the new situation and new tasks, the Central Committee is strengthening the building of intra-Party rules and regulations with the Party constitution as the core." Revision of the Party constitution to reflect these changes is therefore probable.

## Central Committee Changes

The Hong Kong communist newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* on 19 September cited "a source" as stating that the list of candidates nominated for membership on the 17th Central Committee "has been finalized" after a year and a half's deliberation. On the same day, Hong Kong's other communist newspaper, *Wen Wei Po*, noted that 55 of the 198 members of the current Central Committee (28 percent) were not listed among the 2,217 delegates to the 17th Congress, and drew the reasonable inference that they would be dropped from Central Committee membership by reason of death, retirement, or prosecution for corrupt behavior. The scale of Central Committee turnover that results from the 17th Congress is likely to be significantly greater than what the *Wen Wei Po* analysis suggests. The scale of turnover is difficult to gauge at this point, though it will perhaps not be as great as occurred at the 16th Congress in 2002, when a sweeping generational turnover prompted half of the 356 full and alternate members to give way to new replacements.

Changes over the past year since October 2006 in leadership posts that normally merit concurrent seating on the Central Committee—in the Central Committee departments, the State Council ministries, the military, and the provinces—confirm that there will be significant turnover on the body at the 17th Congress. The recent leadership changes include the following:

- ***The central Party apparatus:*** Among the directors of the 21 "units subordinate to the Central Committee," there have been, with one exception, no changes over the past year. The single exception is highly significant: the replacement in September of General Office Director Wang Gang by the head of Hu Jintao's personal staff Ling Jihua. Control over the General Office—which manages a wide range of secretarial, logistical, communications, and security functions for the entire Politburo leadership—is a critical cornerstone of a general secretary's power. Hu's appointment of his own man in the post, displacing a man appointed by Jiang Zemin in March 1999, is an important step in Hu's consolidation of power. Despite the lack of changes in the run-up to the 17th Congress, a number of retirements and new appointments are likely in the offing. These include the retirement of Politburo Standing Committee member Luo Gan, who concurrently heads two law and security committees in the central Party apparatus; Party Documents Research Office Director

Teng Wensheng, 67; Party Policy Research Office Director Wang Huning, once a close adviser of Jiang Zemin's; possibly Dai Bingguo, 66, who directs the Central Committee Foreign Affairs Office and serves concurrently as secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Party committee; and General You Xigui, who directs the General Office's Bodyguards Bureau (which provides security for the leadership) and who, at 68, has reached the extended mandatory retirement age for PLA generals.

- ***The State Council ministries:*** Over the past year, 11 of 28 State Council ministers have been replaced; among them, 9 are members of the 16th Central Committee. As of October 2006, 22 of 28 State Council ministers were Central Committee members, 1 was an alternate, and 5 had no concurrent Central Committee appointment. With the changes over the past year, only 15 ministers serve on the 16th Central Committee as full members, while 3 more serve as alternates and 10 hold no membership. Most State Council ministers are given concurrent seats on the Central Committee, and so the new 17th Central Committee will likely include several new faces from the State Council. The picture is complicated by the fact that four State Council ministries—Foreign Affairs, Science and Technology, Health, Construction—and two ministry-level commissions—State Ethnic Affairs and State Population and Family Planning—currently practice the “two heads” system of leadership, whereby the minister is not concurrently secretary of the ministry's party committee. In two of those ministries—Health and Science and Technology—the recently appointed ministers are not members of the CCP and therefore cannot sit on the Party Central Committee. It is a certainty, however, that the secretaries of the Party committees in those two ministries will be elected to the Central Committee.
- ***In the PLA:*** The most important changes in the staffing of the PLA's four general departments—the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), the General Logistics Department, and the General Armament Department (GAD)—were the transfer in June of Guangzhou Military Region Commander Liu Zhenwu to the post of deputy director of the General Staff Department and later, in September, the replacement of GSD chief Liang Guanglie by GAD Director Chen Bingde. Although Liang, at 67, may retire, it also seems possible that he will succeed Cao Gangchuan as Central Military Commission vice chairman, Politburo member, and minister of national defense. PLA regulations adopted in 1994 that mandate retirement by generals by the age of 68 do not apply to generals serving as CMC vice chairman. Meanwhile, since June the commanders of five military regions (Guangzhou, Beijing, Lanzhou, Nanjing and Chengdu) and political commissars of three (Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Lanzhou) have been replaced. The commanders and political commissars of China's seven military regions are usually concurrently Central Committee members. With the recent reshuffle, five of seven commanders and five of seven political commissars are not members of the 16th Central Committee and may expect membership on the 17th.
- ***In the provinces:*** In the months between October 2006 and June 2007, all 31 of China's provinces held provincial Party congresses, several of which produced new leaderships. Over the year since October 2006, 10 provinces have new Party chiefs

and 7 new governors. Among the 10 new Party chiefs, 4 were rotations at the same level and part of the reshuffle in March that moved Zhejiang Party chief Xi Jinping from Zhejiang to Shanghai, Zhang Gaoli from Shandong to Tianjin, Li Jianguo from Shaanxi to Shandong, and Zhao Liqi from Qinghai to Shaanxi. Currently, 24 of the 31 provincial Party chiefs are members of the 16th Central Committee and 5 are alternates, while only 2 are not members and may expect to be given seats on the 17th Central Committee. Among the outgoing Party secretaries displaced in the round of provincial Party congresses, Tianjin's Zhang Lichang at 68 is likely to retire, while Sichuan's Zhang Xuezhong, at 64 and with service in Gansu in the 1970s when both Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao served there, may move to a post at the national level.

All of these recent leadership changes signal corresponding changes in the membership of the new Central Committee to be elected at the 17th Congress, but they are not a complete indicator of pending changes on the Central Committee. A second wave of leadership changes will follow in the months after the 17th Congress. Among other things, the 11th NPC next March will likely undertake a new reorganization of the State Council, and changes in the Central Committee departments often follow rather than precede a Party congress. Because of this, the reason for appointment of some members of the new Central Committee elected at the 17th Congress will not become evident until some time after the congress, when the second wave of appointments takes hold. In that regard, appointment on the Central Committee itself will be an indicator of those pending changes.

## Changes in the Politburo and Its Standing Committee

True to past practice, Chinese media have given no indication as to changes to the Party's top decision-making bodies, the Politburo and its Standing Committee. Rumors have circulated for months about the size of the Politburo Standing Committee that will be elected at the 17th Central Committee's First Plenum, the day after the congress closes. These rumors—suggesting alternately that the Standing Committee will shrink to seven members or retain the current level of nine members, and offering purported slates of what the new line-up will be—are fun to debate, but they are also mutually discrediting and of uncertain credibility. Projections of changes in the broader membership of the Politburo suffer from comparable objections.

Aside from undoubtedly important considerations of personal and factional allegiance, appointments to the Politburo and its Standing Committee are made in light of at least two other concerns. First, as Dengist criteria of expertise and competence have taken hold to produce an increasingly technocratic leadership in the Jiang and Hu eras, Politburo membership to a significant degree reflects representational *ex officio* considerations. Increasingly, the heads of critical Central Committee departments, State Council positions and other key posts concurrently gain seats on the Politburo, staffing it with all of the key leaders needed to address any significant policy matter. Similarly, the Politburo Standing Committee in the post-Mao era brings together the top leaders of all

of the major hierarchies in the PRC political order—the PRC president and chairman of the Party and PRC CMC (concurrently in the person of the general secretary), the NPC chairman, the PRC premier, the chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, a united front umbrella body), and the executive secretary of the Party Secretariat. Incumbents of all these posts may expect serious consideration for inclusion on the Politburo and its Standing Committee.

Second, appointments to the Politburo since 1987 have shown a clear pattern of allotting proportionate appointment to members serving in key constituencies. By this procedure, as Table 1 suggests, roughly equal representation on the Politburo has since 1987 been given to members serving concurrently in the Party apparatus, in the NPC and State Council government system, and among regionally based Party secretaries, while representation of the military has been severely limited.

**Table 1**  
*Politburo Membership by Organizational Constituency, 1982–2002*

	<i>12th</i>	<i>13th</i>	<i>14th</i>	<i>15th</i>	<i>16th</i>
<i>PB</i>	25 + 3	17	20 + 2	22 + 2	24 + 1
<i>PBSC</i>	6	5	7	7	9
<i>Secretariat</i>	9	4+1	5	7	7
<i>Secs on PB</i>	4	2	4	6	5
<i>CC Depts.</i>	2	1	1	1	2
<i>SC VP/SC</i>	2/2	3/2	4/1	4/1	4
<i>NPC VCs</i>	2	1	2	2	1
<i>Military</i>	8	0	1	2	2
<i>Regional</i>	0	4	5	4	6
<i>Other</i>	12	6	8	10	11

*Notes:* The first three lines give the total membership of the Politburo, its Standing Committee, and the Secretariat across the period. The subsequent lines give the numbers from various constituencies. PB = Politburo (numbers indicate full members + alternates); PBSC = Politburo Standing Committee; “Secs on PB” refers to members of the Secretariat who serve concurrently on the Politburo; CC = Central Committee; SC VP/SC = State Council vice premiers and state councilors; NPC VCs = National People’s Congress vice chairmen.

Balancing of organizational constituencies on the Politburo appears aimed at sustaining a collective dynamic among an oligarchy at the top of the Party and at inhibiting the rise of dictatorial powers by any single leaders, as previously enjoyed by Mao Zedong or by Stalin in Soviet leadership politics. Balanced representation prevents any one of them from emerging as a predominating bloc and base of power in the leadership. The severe limitation of military representation—only two members in contrast to the 5–7 members from the other major constituencies—may reflect a continuation of the attempt to limit the influence of the military in the top political leadership. an effort that goes back to the early 1970s in the wake of the 1971 Lin Biao affair and that has extended throughout the Deng Xiaoping era. It may also reflect an

attempt to curb the power of the general secretary, who since 1989 has served concurrently as chairman of the CMC.<sup>4</sup>

With all of these considerations in mind, a number of tentative inferences about forthcoming Politburo appointments may be made. Table 2 shows the present line-up of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, together with each member's age this year and a listing of concurrent posts.

**Table 2**

*The 16th Central Committee Politburo*

***Standing Committee (rank order)***

HU JINTAO 胡锦涛 (65)	PRC president; chairman, CCP & PRC Central Military Commissions
WU BANGGUO 吴邦国 (66)	Chairman, National People's Congress
WEN JIABAO 温家宝 (65)	State Council premier
JIA QINGLIN 贾庆林 (67)	Chairman, CPPCC
ZENG QINGHONG 曾庆红 (68)	Secretariat; PRC vice president; president, Central Party School
[HUANG JU 黄菊] (69)	Executive vice premier (Deceased June 2007)
WU GUANZHENG 吴官正 (69)	Secretary, CDIC
LI CHANGCHUN 李长春 (63)	Supervises the ideology-propaganda system
LUO GAN 罗幹 (72)	Supervises security work

***Regular Members (stroke order)***

WANG LEQUAN 王乐泉 (63)	Secretary, Xinjiang UAR CPC
WANG ZHAOGUO 王兆国 (66)	Executive vice chairman, NPC SC; president, ACFTU
HUI LIANGYU 回良玉 (63)	Vice premier
LIU QI 刘淇 (65)	Secretary, Beijing CPC
LIU YUNSHAN 刘云山 (60)	Secretariat; director; CPC Propaganda Department
WU YI 吴仪 (69)	Vice premier
ZHANG LICHANG 张立昌 (68)	(Replaced as secretary, Tianjin CPC March 2007)
ZHANG DEJIANG 张德江 (61)	Secretary, Guangdong CPC
[CHEN LIANGYU 陈良宇] (61)	Secretary, Shanghai CPC ("Suspended" Sept 2006; expelled July 2007)
ZHOU YONGKANG 周永康 (65)	Secretariat; minister of public security; state councilor
YU ZHENGSHENG 俞正声 (62)	Secretary, Hubei CPC
HE GUOQIANG 贺国强 (64)	Secretariat; director, CPC Organization Department
GUO BOXIONG 郭伯雄 (65)	Vice chairman, CMC
CAO GANGCHUAN 曹刚川 (72)	Vice chairman, CMC; minister of national defense; state councilor
ZENG PEIYAN 曾培炎 (69)	Vice premier

***Alternate Member***

WANG GANG 王刚 (65)	Secretariat; director, CPC General Office
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Two leaders are already gone—Chen Liangyu, who was suspended as Politburo member and removed as Shanghai Party chief in September 2006, and finally expelled from the Party in July 2007 on charges of corruption; and Huang Ju, who died after a

long struggle with cancer in June this year. Several more are likely candidates for retirement on grounds of age, according to an internal Party norm apparently established in 1997 that members be ready to retire at the next Party congress once they reach the age of 70. On that basis, Standing Committee member and security chief Luo Gan and CMC vice chairman and defense minister Cao Gangchuan should retire, and at least three more—Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) chairman Wu Guanzheng and Vice Premiers Wu Yi and Zeng Peiyan—all at 69, may join Cao. Former Tianjin Party secretary Zhang Lichang was replaced in March 2007, and, at 68, may also retire.

Predicting the replacements for most of these eight is guesswork at this point. It seems likely that Zhang Lichang's replacement in Tianjin, Zhang Gaoli, will gain a seat, as will Xi Jinping, who became Shanghai Party chief in March 2007. Presuming that Xi continues in his Shanghai post, he is not likely to be given a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee, contrary to several rumors that have asserted he would be. Regionally based leaders have served only on the full Politburo, and never on its Standing Committee. The most likely candidate to replace retiring security head Luo Gan on the Standing Committee may be Zhou Yongkang, who currently serves as minister of public security and sits on the current Politburo. As noted above, recent changes in the General Staff Department suggest that Cao Gangchuan's replacement on the Politburo may be former GSD chief Liang Guanglie. Wang Gang's replacement as General Office director by Hu Jintao's personal staff chief Ling Jihua makes it likely that Ling will be appointed to the Politburo, either as a full member or, like Wang, as an alternate.

## Hu's Successor

If the Hu leadership follows the precedents and procedures established by Deng Xiaoping that facilitated Hu's rise to the top, then the 17th Congress may be expected to take preparatory steps toward his own succession by a younger leader at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. Hu's tentative successor will not be named as such, but will rather be evident from his placement—most likely ranked fifth—on the Politburo Standing Committee and by his incremental acquisition of key posts placing him directly behind Hu in the Party, state, and military hierarchies. He would thus immediately become the executive secretary of the Party Secretariat—managing the Party apparatus in Hu's stead—and president of the Central Party School; then next year, vice president of the PRC; and in 2009, vice chairman of the CMC.

Some rumors have circulated that the Hu leadership may not designate a single successor-in-training and instead appoint more than one younger man to the Politburo Standing Committee, allowing them to compete to succeed Hu over the next five years until the 18th Congress. This approach seems unlikely since it amounts to an open invitation to leadership factionalism over the next few years—something that all of the post-Mao leaderships have worked hard to suppress.

PRC media have given no indication at all as to who Hu's successor may be. Based on age considerations, the candidate ought to be in his mid-50s and, like Hu

himself, perhaps have experience both at the national level and in the provinces. Independent Hong Kong and foreign observers have focused on several possible candidates meeting these criteria, among them two who have strong connections to Hu Jintao—Liaoning Party chief Li Keqiang and Jiangsu Party chief Li Yuanchao.<sup>5</sup> Suggestively, an article in *Beijing Review* on 1 March 2007 spotlighted both Li's as examples of "rising political stars" emerging in the Party. There is no necessity, however, that the candidate be a crony of Hu's, and the politics of oligarchic collective leadership may in fact lead to the designation of a candidate more broadly acceptable to the entire top leadership.

A corollary problem of preparing for succession is deciding what to do with Zeng Qinghong, the presumed leader representing Jiang Zemin's "Shanghai Gang" and currently the Party's fifth-ranked leader and member of the Politburo Standing Committee. Over the past five years, Zeng has served as executive secretary of the Secretariat, president of the Central Party School, and PRC vice president, though not as CMC vice chairman. Zeng's service in these positions has seemed an interim arrangement as back-up to Hu Jintao, should Hu fail physically or politically. If the leadership moves to prepare a successor according to the pattern set down by Deng Xiaoping to prepare Hu for succession, then Zeng will have to vacate these posts in favor of the candidate successor. One solution may be that Zeng, at 68, retire. Alternatively, he may serve another term on the Politburo Standing Committee, perhaps as chairman of the CDIC chairman in place of retiring Wu Guanzheng or, should Jia Qinglin retire, as CPPCC chief. Either way, because of his stature and political connections, the fate of Zeng may prove a ticklish political question going into the Party congress.

## Hu's Stature

One of the reasons that Hu's tenure since 2002 as Party general secretary has been intriguing is that he has not gathered about him any of the trappings of pre-eminent leadership that were routinely enjoyed by Jiang Zemin or Deng Xiaoping before him. For example, Hu has not been identified as "core leader" of his fourth generation of PRC leaders, in contrast to Deng and Jiang, who were routinely called "core" of their respective leadership generations. In contrast to references to "the 15th CC leadership collective with comrade Jiang Zemin as the core," PRC media since 2002 have referred only to "the 16th CC leadership collective with comrade Hu Jintao as general secretary." Similarly, none of the ideological and policy departures that have emerged under Hu's tenure—the "series of major strategic ideas put forward by the Central Committee since the 16th Party Congress," including "people-centered" governance, the "scientific development concept," "building a new socialist countryside," the "socialist concepts of honor and disgrace," and building a "socialist harmonious society"—has been advertised as Hu's own innovation or his distinctive intellectual property. Instead, they are routinely cited as products of the Party's collective leadership.

One explanation for this failure to assert pre-eminence has been that Hu has not yet had the power to do so. An alternative explanation, long argued by this author, is that

this playing down of Hu's stature—depicting him simply as first among equals rather than as the “core leader”—reflects a deliberate policy intended to enhance collective leadership that Hu initiated himself. Presuming, as seems likely from the run-up, that the 17th Party Congress will in significant measure allow Hu to consolidate his own power in the leadership, the outcome of the congress may offer new evidence to test these competing interpretations.

If the latter interpretation is correct, for example, then Party constitutional revisions to incorporate the notions of the “scientific development concept” and of “socialist harmonious society” will not attribute them to Hu's authorship. Similarly, Party statements and media commentary will continue to avoid referring to Hu as “core leader” and refer only to “the 17th CC leadership collective with comrade Hu Jintao as general secretary.” If these conjectures come to pass, they will provide fresh evidence for the institutionalization of oligarchic collective leadership in China.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the 2002 Beidaihe meeting and other preparations for the 16th Party Congress, see Alice Miller, “Beijing Sets the Stage to Convene the 16th Party Congress,” *China Leadership Monitor* 4 (Fall 2002).

<sup>2</sup> On the emergence of the “scientific development concept,” see Joseph Fewsmith, “Promoting the Scientific Development Concept,” *China Leadership Monitor*, 11 (Summer 2004). On the “socialist harmonious society” theme, see Alice Miller, “Hu Jintao and the Sixth Plenum,” *China Leadership Monitor* 20 (Winter 2007).

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the debates from the right on democratic socialism and democratization, see the article by Joseph Fewsmith in this issue of the *Monitor*.

<sup>4</sup> A more detailed analysis of balancing among organizational constituencies on the CCP Politburo and its origins is presented in the brilliant paper, “Institutionalization and the Changing Dynamics of Chinese Leadership Politics,” presented at the Brookings Institution conference, “Changes in China's Political Landscape: The 17th Party Congress and Beyond,” on 12 April 2007, to be published in the forthcoming conference publication by Brookings Institution Press later this year. A similar effort at balanced representation of organizational constituencies on the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) was evident in the 1970s. On the limited military representation on the Politburo, see Alice Miller, “Hu Jintao and the PLA Brass,” *China Leadership Monitor* 21 (Summer 2007).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of the careers and connections of both Li Keqiang and Li Yuanchao, see the article by Li Cheng in this issue of the *Monitor*.