

The Work System of the New Hu Leadership

Alice Miller

Over the four months since the 17th Party Congress altered the line-up of the Party's Politburo, public appearances by the new leadership have made clear how it has divided up responsibilities for the work of managing major sectors of policy. The resulting division of policy work also reveals a careful balancing of representation among major institutional constituencies on the Politburo, a hallmark technique introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1980s to reinforce collective leadership in the oligarchy.

Politburo Division of Policy Work

In addition to participating in the Party's top-level decision making, the members of the Politburo routinely take up responsibility for supervising Party work in specific sectors of policy. They perform this function either by serving concurrently in other high-level posts in the political order or by coordinating policy through the Secretariat and its leading small groups (LSGs), or both. This division of policy on one hand is intended to ensure compliance with Politburo decisions in the relevant policy sectors in the broader political system; on the other, it enables representation of those policy sectors in Politburo deliberations. For example, since 2002, Politburo Standing Committee member Li Changchun has supervised work in the ideology and propaganda sector—whose purview includes the media, cultural affairs, education, and the social sciences, which encompasses a huge array of institutions in the Party and beyond—by presiding over the Party's Central Propaganda and Ideology LSG (中央宣传思想领导小组). He also speaks for that sector in Politburo deliberations on policies that affect it.

The division of policy work among the Politburo's leaders is normally established at the Politburo's first meeting after their appointment at the new Central Committee's First Plenum, immediately following a Party congress. Xinhua's report on the first meeting of the new Politburo appointed after the 16th Party Congress in November 2002, for example, stated that the session “studied relevant questions on the division of work in the Politburo.” (Xinhua, 16 November 2002). The policy responsibilities that some Politburo leaders assume are evident from other leadership posts that they hold concurrently. Politburo member Liu Yunshan, for example, serves concurrently as director of the Party Propaganda Department, and so his policy supervisory and representational roles are apparent from this fact alone.

Other leaders on the Politburo do not hold such concurrent leadership posts, and so their policy responsibilities are not immediately evident. In addition, PRC media do not ordinarily refer to the Party LSGs or their members. PRC media, for example, have

given no indication that Politburo Standing Committee member Li Changchun holds any other leadership post. Instead, his policy responsibilities must be inferred indirectly from his public appearances. Thus, Li frequently appears at events that fall under the purview of the propaganda and ideological sector, and he often gives the keynote address at major conferences and meetings in this sector. From such appearances, together with his slot on the Politburo Standing Committee, it is a safe inference that he chairs the Central Propaganda and Ideology LSG.

Xinhua's account of the first meeting on 23 October 2007 of the new Politburo appointed at the 17th Central Committee's First Plenum did not specifically state that the meeting had worked out the policy portfolios of the new membership, though that task was likely among the "other matters" that the meeting took up. That such assignments have been made is clear, however, from appointments of several Politburo members to new posts and from their public appearances since the Party congress.

The Current Leadership's Division of Work: The Party Apparatus

Xi Jinping's new appointments and public appearances strongly bear out the conclusion that he is being prepared to succeed Hu Jintao in 2012–2015 according to the same pattern that prepared Hu to succeed Jiang Zemin in 2002–2005.¹ In late December, PRC media began reporting him in the new role of president of the Central Party School, a post that Hu Jintao had held for a decade before becoming Party general secretary in 2002. In addition, Xi has appeared on numerous occasions since the 17th Party Congress both presiding over and as keynote speaker at conferences on Party affairs, confirming his role in managing the Party apparatus as executive secretary of the Party Secretariat, a position that Hu also occupied for 10 years before succeeding Jiang Zemin.

Meanwhile, since the Party Congress Li Changchun has continued to appear in public roles associated with the supervision of the ideology and propaganda sector. On 23 January, for example, he gave the keynote address to the annual national conference on propaganda and ideology work in Beijing. Similarly, public appearances by Zhou Yongkang confirm the speculation that he has assumed top-level responsibility for legal and security affairs. On 25 December, he presided over and addressed a national conference on legal affairs in Beijing.

The Current Leadership's Division of Work: The State Council

Several leadership changes since the 17th Party Congress have been made in anticipation of appointments to the State Council at the 11th NPC in March. These include:

- In the provinces, in late November, Bo Xilai replaced Wang Yang as Chongqing Party secretary, and Wang moved to Guangzhou where he replaced Zhang Dejiang as Guangdong Party secretary, leaving Zhang without a post. Meanwhile, Wang Qishan was replaced as Beijing mayor.

- On 2 December, Xinhua disclosed that Sichuan Party secretary Du Qinglin had replaced Liu Yandong as director of the Central Committee's United Front Work Department.

That these changes left Zhang, Wang, and Liu only temporarily without posts beyond their positions as members of the Politburo was made clear in a 4 December report in the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* on the opening in Beijing of the annual national conference on economic work. Confirming widespread speculations, the report stated that all three would become vice premiers or state councilors at the 11th NPC in March 2008. The report predicted that Wang would replace Wu Yi as vice premier in charge of finance and foreign trade, that Zhang would replace Zeng Peiyan as vice premier in charge of industry and energy, and that Liu would assume responsibility on the State Council for China's growing private sector.

These pending appointments to the State Council will be complemented by the appointment of Li Keqiang, the seventh-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee, as executive vice premier. The same *Ta Kung Pao* report on 4 December confirmed that Li would be appointed to that post to "serve as general manager of China's economy." Similarly, a 17 December report in the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Wen Wei Po* highlighted Li's role "at the helm" of pending reform of the State Council at the upcoming NPC in March. In keeping with their status as awaiting appointment at the NPC, all four leaders—Li, Wang, Zhang, and Liu—have made virtually no public appearances apart from occasions at which the entire Politburo turns out.

The list of top State Council officials—the premier, vice premiers, and state councilors (who collectively are the State Council's Executive Committee)—who are likely to emerge from the 11th NPC in March 2008 is presented in table 1. (Those listed among the likely state councilors with question marks after their names are speculative, rather than based on confirmation in PRC media.)

Table 1
Projected State Council Turnover at the 11th NPC

<i>Post</i>	<i>The Current State Council</i>	<i>The Upcoming State Council</i>
Premier	*Wen Jiabao	*Wen Jiabao
Exec. Vice Premier	*Huang Ju (deceased June 2007)	*Li Keqiang
Vice Premier	*Wu Yi (foreign trade, health)	*Wang Qishan (finance)
	*Zeng Peiyan (industry & energy)	*Zhang Dejiang (industry & energy)
	*Hui Liangyu (agriculture)	*Hui Liangyu (agriculture)
State Councilor	*Zhou Yongkang (law & security)	*Zhou Yongkang?
	*Cao Gangchuan (defense)	Liang Guanglie?
	Tang Jiaxuan (foreign affairs)	Dai Bingguo?

(continues on following page)

Table 1 (continued)

	Hua Jianmin (administration)	Ma Kai (administration)
	Chen Zhili (education; S&T)	*Liu Yandong (private sector)
Secretary-General	Hua Jianmin	Ma Kai

*Indicates membership on the Politburo.

The Current Leadership's Division of Work: Overall

Taken together, all of these changes with respect to the Party apparatus and the State Council have clarified the division of policy work among the overall Politburo membership that will be finalized with the convocation of the 11th NPC in March. The final division of responsibilities is presented in table 2.

Table 2

The 17th Central Committee Politburo Division of Policy Work

<i>Standing Committee (listed by rank order)</i>	
HU JINTAO 胡锦涛 (66)*	PRC president; chairman, CCP & PRC Central Military Commission
WU BANGGUO 吴邦国 (67)	Chairman, National People's Congress
WEN JIABAO 温家宝 (66)	State Council premier
JIA QINGLIN 贾庆林 (68)	Chairman, CPPCC
LI CHANGCHUN 李长春 (64)	Supervises ideology-propaganda system
XI JINPING 习近平 (55)	Executive secretary, Secretariat; president, Central Party School
LI KEQIANG 李克强 (53)	Executive vice premier (macroeconomic policy)
HE GUOQIANG 贺国强 (65)	Chairman, Central Discipline Inspection Commission
ZHOU YONGKANG 周永康 (66)	Supervises legal & security work; state councilor over law
<i>Regular Members (listed by stroke order)</i>	
WANG GANG 王刚 (66)	Secretary, Central Committee Organs Work Committee
WANG LEQUAN 王乐泉 (64)	Secretary, Xinjiang UAR CP Committee
WANG ZHAOGUO 王兆国 (67)	Executive vice chairman, NPC SC; president, ACFTU
WANG QISHAN 王岐山 (60)	Vice premier (finance and foreign trade)
HUI LIANGYU 回良玉 (64)	Vice premier (agriculture)
LIU QI 刘淇 (66)	Secretary, Beijing CP Committee
LIU YUNSHAN 刘云山 (61)	Secretariat; director, CCP Propaganda Department
LIU YANDONG 刘延东 (63)	State councilor
LI YUANCHAO 李源潮 (58)	Secretariat; director, CCP Organization Department
WANG YANG 汪洋 (53)	Secretary, Guangdong CP Committee
ZHANG GAOLI 张高丽 (63)	Secretary, Tianjin CP Committee
ZHANG DEJIANG 张德江 (62)	Vice premier (industry and energy)
YU ZHENGSHEG 俞正声 (63)	Secretary, Shanghai CP Committee

(continues on following page)

Table 2 (*continued*)

XU CAIHOU 徐才厚 (65)	Vice chairman, CCP CMC
GUO BOXIONG 郭伯雄 (66)	Vice chairman, CCP CMC
BO XILAI 薄熙来 (59)	Secretary, Chongqing CP Committee

*Numbers in parentheses indicate age attained during the year 2008.

From this list, the policy sectors most heavily represented on the Politburo are, perhaps not surprisingly, Party affairs and economic policy. Thus:

Table 3
Policy Clusters in the Politburo Leadership

<i>Policy Sector</i>	<i>Leaders*</i>
Party apparatus	Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, He Guoqiang , Wang Gang, and Li Yuanchao
Finance and economy	Wen Jiabao, Li Keqiang , Wang Qinshan, Hui Liangyu, Liu Yandong, and Zhang Dejiang
Propaganda and ideology	Li Changchun and Liu Yunshan
United front work	Jia Qinglin and Wang Zhaoguo
Military	Hu Jintao , Xu Caihou, and Guo Boxiong
Security	Zhou Yongkang
Foreign affairs & Taiwan	Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao

*Boldface denotes membership on the Politburo Standing Committee.

These clusters of leaders involved in the same policy sector and the absence of representation of some of the sectors on the Party Secretariat suggests a diminution of the role of the Secretariat in policy coordination, now largely confined to Party affairs. The new Party Secretariat, appointed at the 17th Central Committee's First Plenum in October 2007, includes Party secretaries for propaganda and ideology (Liu Yunshan and, perhaps, Wang Huning) and party affairs (Li Yuanchao), as did the outgoing Party Secretariat. The new Secretariat, however, does not include secretaries for either the military or for security affairs, as the former Secretariat did.

Most of these policy clusters work through respective LSGs in coordinating the Politburo's policy decisions. Economic affairs has since 1958 been managed by the Central Finance and Economy LSG, and foreign relations and Taiwan policy have been supervised by the Central Foreign Affairs LSG and Central Taiwan Affairs LSG,

respectively. The Party's Central Military Commission is effectively the LSG for military affairs. None of these four leading small groups has a representative on the Party Secretariat, suggesting that there may have been revision in the Party's policy coordinating mechanisms.

Constituency Balancing on the Politburo

The completion of post-congress adjustments to the Politburo leadership and the posts that they concurrently hold in the political order makes it possible to weigh the balance of representation among the major institutional constituencies on the Politburo. The Politburo Standing Committee includes as four ranking members the top leaders of the Party, PRC, and PLA (Hu Jintao), of the NPC (Wu Bangguo), of the State Council (Wen Jiabao), and of the united front umbrella organization, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Jia Qinglin). Beneath them, the remaining 21 members of the Politburo may be divided among four major institutional groups—Party apparatus, state institutions, regional Party leaders, and military-security—as follows:

Table 4

Representation of Institutional Constituencies on the 17th Central Committee Politburo

<i>Party Apparatus</i>	<i>State Organs</i>	<i>Regional</i>	<i>Military/Security</i>
Li Changchun	Li Keqiang	Wang Lequan	Zhou Yongkang
Xi Jinping	Wang Zhaoguo	Liu Qi	
He Guoqiang	Wang Qishan	Wang Yang	Xu Caihou
Wang Gang	Hui Liangyu	Zhang Gaoli	Guo Boxiong
Liu Yunshan	Liu Yandong	Yu Zhengsheng	
Li Yuanchao	Zhang Dejiang	Bo Xilai	

The emergent balance among representatives on the Politburo from the Party apparatus, NPC and State Council, and regional Party leaders, as well as the constrained representation of military leaders, has been an abiding feature of Politburo leaderships that has developed since the late 1980s.² The 16th Central Committee Politburo, for example, included six representatives of the Party apparatus, six from the NPC and State Council, and six regional Party secretaries, as well as two PLA generals.

The purpose of this balancing appears intended to reinforce collective leadership among the Politburo oligarchy in two ways. On one hand, it appears to be aimed at inhibiting any one leader or bloc of leaders from any constituency from asserting dominance over all of the others. On the other hand, it also appears aimed at limiting the ability of the general secretary to acquire dictatorial powers over the rest of the leadership, as Mao had enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s and as Stalin had done in Soviet politics. The constrained representation on the Politburo of the PLA—which has since 1987 been limited to two or fewer members—seems, in particular, aimed at that concern.

Institutionalization in Politburo Politics

Both the division of policy work and the balancing of institutional constituencies among the Politburo leadership reflect practices promoted by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s.³ Deng's effort to formalize a division of policy labor among the top leadership drew on reforms begun in the 1956–58 period to institutionalize a system of leadership decision-making focused in the Politburo Standing Committee, following that body's creation at the 1956 Eighth Party Congress. The resulting system broke down early in the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when the Cultural Revolution Small Group effectively displaced the Politburo Standing Committee. Over the Cultural Revolution decade, all semblance of a disciplined leadership division of policy responsibilities broke down, as leaders working in disparate sectors and institutional constituencies frequently poached in the areas of others. On consolidating power in the early 1980s, Deng worked quickly to reassert such discipline in leadership policy responsibility.

The effort to balance institutional constituencies on the Politburo emerged in the same period as part of the effort to prevent the recurrence of a leader's attaining the predominating power that Mao had attained at the expense of the rest of the leadership, with such tragic results (from Deng's perspective) for the Party organization and for political stability. Deng's initial effort to instill practices of collective leadership in the Politburo, at the 12th CCP Congress in 1982, ultimately failed with Hu Yaobang's demotion as Party general secretary in 1987 for using the Secretariat to usurp Politburo decision-making prerogatives. The pattern of balancing institutional constituencies emerged in that context as a means of facilitating collective decision-making under the general secretary as first among equals rather than as paramount leader.

The upshot of both trends in the Politburo's work system has been to bring about fundamental changes in the dynamics of leadership politics at the Politburo level. As a consequence of these trends, Politburo membership is increasingly allotted on the basis of policy expertise and of institutional representation. This does not mean that conflict among leadership factions has withered away; it simply means that leadership competition has instead been channeled into a structure of leadership work that suits the tasks of managing an increasingly complex economy and society and maintaining political stability to that end.

Notes

¹ On this conclusion, see "China's New Party Leadership," *China Leadership Monitor* 23.

² On this point, see "Hu Jintao and the PLA Brass," *China Leadership Monitor* 21.

³ On Deng's effort in the 1980s to restore the leadership work system of the later 1950s, see 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," 12 April 2007, to be published in the forthcoming conference publication in early 2008.