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Political Succession and Leadership Issues in China: Implications for U.S. Policy

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name redacted
Specialist in Asian Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

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Summary

In 2002 and 2003, the People's Republic of China (PRC) will be making key leadership changes within the government and the Communist Party. A number of current senior leaders, including Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, Premier Zhu Rongji, and National Peoples' Congress Chairman Li Peng, are scheduled to be stepping down from their posts, and it is not yet clear who will be assuming these positions from among the younger generation of leaders – the so-called "fourth generation," comprised of those born in the 1940s and early 1950s. It is expected that new leaders will be ascending to positions at the head of at least two and possibly all three of the PRC's three vertical political structures: the Chinese Communist Party; the state government bureaucracy; and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

During a period likely to last into 2003, the succession process remains very much in flux. Some who follow Beijing politics have raised questions about how vigorously China's current senior leaders will adhere to their self-imposed term limitations. Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, for instance, is expected to try to keep his position as head of China's military on the grounds that the global anti-terrorism campaign and internal challenges to Chinese rule create a special need now for consistent leadership. Some reports even have hinted that Jiang and others may be interested in keeping their Party and government posts as well. Even should this occur, members of the PRC's next generation are likely to be moving into other positions of power and ruling the country for the rest of the decade and beyond.

More so than before, China's potential leaders differ from predecessor generations. While they are better educated (all are university graduates), they also have more diverse backgrounds and experiences than previous leaders, and lack the kind of unifying formative experience that Mao's "Long March" contemporaries had. Having come of age in the political and social chaos of the Cultural Revolution, they may be more cynical about politics, more disillusioned with the experiences of their own Party, and thus less committed to or respectful of past ideologies. Some suggest this may make them more willing to experiment with new or untried methods. On the other hand, this generation is largely a product of Mao's isolationist years. Its members were not educated abroad, as were many members of Mao's generation, and as a result they may be more parochial and nationalistic in their views than previous leaders.

Current speculation is focusing on a collection of fourth-generation front-runners, sometimes referred to in the Chinese press as "cross-century successors," for key positions. Those potentially moving up include: Hu Jintao (now vice-president), Wen Jiabao, Wu Bangguo, Li Changchun, Zeng Qinghong, and Luo Gan. As all of these men are associated with specific current leaders, the ultimate outcome of the succession process may also provide clues as to which retired leaders remain influential behind the scenes. This paper provides an overview of the PRC's current government and party leadership structure; discusses and assesses pending leadership changes, the succession process itself, and the implications for U.S. policy; and provides information about key fourth generation successor candidates.

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Political Succession and Leadership Issues in China: Implications for U.S. Policy

Introduction

At the 16th Party Congress beginning November 8, 2002, and at the subsequent meeting of the National People's Congress in March 2003, the People's Republic of China (PRC) will be making key leadership changes within both the government and the Communist Party. A number of the PRC's current senior leaders, including Party Secretary Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji, are scheduled to be stepping down from important posts, and it is not yet clear who will be assuming these positions from among the younger generation of leaders – the so-called "fourth generation," comprised of those born in the 1940s and early 1950s. Whoever the successors will be, members of the PRC's fourth generation are likely to be ruling the country for the rest of the decade and beyond. This paper provides an overview of the PRC's current government and party leadership structure; discusses and assesses pending leadership changes, the succession process itself, and the implications for U.S. policy; and provides information about key fourth generation successor candidates.[1]

Overview and Background

The political structure of the PRC is comprised of three separate, vertically integrated systems: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); the state government apparatus, which is headed by the State Council; and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), whose highest decision making body is the Central Military Commission. In terms of formal position, China's current foremost leader, Jiang Zemin, sits at the top of all three pillars: as Party Secretary he heads the Chinese Communist Party and presides over the Party Politburo; as President of the country he is the titular head of the state government; and as Chairman of the Central Military Commission he is formally the head of the PLA. Practically speaking, the state government apparatus is run by Premier Zhu Rongji and the Central Military Commission is comprised of senior PLA leaders who also exercise influence and power within the military along with Jiang.

Until the 1980s, there was such redundancy among these systems' structures, functions, and personnel that they often were indistinguishable. Party and state structures closely paralleled one another, with party groups the highest decision

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[1] In terms of communist Chinese leadership, Mao Zedong is the first generation; Deng Xiaoping, the second generation; Jiang Zemin and current senior leaders, the third generation

making entities at every state level. Senior government ministers and PLA leaders exercised little effective independence from party control.

This situation began to change in the 1980s under the reform coalition led by Deng Xiaoping. In an attempt to inject more pragmatism, practical experience, and efficiency into decision making processes, reformers in the 13th Party Congress[2] in 1987 instituted political reforms aimed at separating party and state structures and removing the party from most administrative duties, while allowing the party to retain its supremacy in defining broad policy goals and making final decisions on "sensitive" issues.[3] As a result of these and other reforms, government ministries now are more likely to be independent operators, and a cabinet-level minister today functions more like a Chief Executive Officer over his or her agency — still answerable ultimately to a board of directors (the party Politburo), but otherwise with wider latitude in decision making than before. The dominance of economic factors and a proliferation of research groups and other actors in the political system have further decentralized decision making and administrative processes.

Despite these changes, some determining factors have remained the same. Personalities are still of vital importance, with position or title likely to derive from personal connections rather than the reverse. This means that formal institutions of power are still less important than informal power arrangements in PRC decision making. There is still a leadership "core" surrounding a paramount leader. From 1978 until shortly before his death in 1997, the paramount leader was Deng Xiaoping; today, it is Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, although he is regarded by most observers as wielding less power over state and party apparatuses than did Deng. The party is still preeminent — or, as the 1982 Party Constitution puts it, "The Communist Party of China is the vanguard of the Chinese working class, the faithful representative of the interests of the people of all nationalities in China, and the force at the core leading China's cause of socialism." Factional politics are still a potent force in behind-the-scenes maneuvering. And finally, despite the official, formalized power structure, much about China's decision making processes remains a mystery to outsiders.

Chinese Communist Party Leadership

The Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee. At the top of the Chinese Communist Party's political structure is the 21-member party Politburo, considered the most important formal political institution in China. Although

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[2] Party Congresses in the PRC are held approximately every 5 years. At these crucial meetings, the Communist Party makes the Party and government leadership choices and sets the country's policy direction for the next five years. The 16th Party Congress is expected to be held late in 2002.

[3] How an issue becomes "sensitive" in China is not clearly understood. It may be an issue of vital importance to the Chinese leadership (such as the Taiwan issue) or anything involving a major country or trading partner (such as Russia) or anything involving U.S.-China relations. It may also be an issue that the leadership perceives as having an impact on either the party's legitimacy or on an individual leader or group of leaders, such as the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

officially the Politburo in Beijing is the chief political decision making body, its relatively unwieldy size, its inclusion of members who live in cities other than Beijing, and its lack of a known formalized meeting schedule all suggest that the full Politburo is only marginally involved in routine policy decisions. Full involvement of the Politburo is more likely when the stakes are high — as when considering major policy shifts, dealing with crises, or when formal legitimization of a particular policy direction is necessary. It is the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee who are considered to wield real decision-making power. Of the seven members currently on the Politburo Standing Committee, only Li Peng was on the Standing Committee at the time of the Tiananmen Square crackdown of June 4, 1989.

In the past, given the personality-based nature of politics in China, even Politburo membership or the lack of it was not necessarily the basis of a leader's political legitimacy. A key example is Deng Xiaoping, who remained the paramount leader even after he had resigned all his official positions in 1987. Deng played his key role in supporting the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown despite being a member of neither the Politburo Standing Committee nor indeed of the Politburo itself. Nevertheless, politics in China have changed since the early days of the Dengist reforms begun in 1978, and even since the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989. There is, for instance, no one comparable to Deng in the current PRC political scene – that is, a paramount leader without portfolio – and most senior leaders of significant power hold Politburo membership. Despite its continued position at the apex of Chinese political life, the Politburo and its Standing Committee are not thought to be able to dictate policy decisions as much as they once did.

Instead, the Chinese political process has become infused with a much greater number of bureaucratic and non-central government actors than ever before. These include: a more muscular state sector, including government ministries that are significantly more responsible for policy implementation than they have been in the past; provincial and local officials that have more autonomy than before; an increasing body of official and quasi-official policy research groups and think tanks that feed proposals directly into the policy process; a collection of state sector, multinational, and even private business interests that bring more pressure to bear on policy decisions; a newly vigorous academic and university community; and a more robust and more diverse media that informs public opinion. In addition, China's approximately 3,000-member National People's Congress (NPC), largely a symbolic organization for much of its existence, has begun to eschew its rubber-stamp identity and become somewhat more assertive in recent years.

The Secretariat. Another important vehicle for the Chinese Communist Party is the Secretariat, officially listed as immediately under the Politburo. The role of the Secretariat has been inconsistent in communist Chinese history. Originally the supreme decision-making body (in the 1940s), the Secretariat today is intended to be subordinate to the Politburo. Under China's 1982 constitution, the Secretariat is described as an administrative rather than a decision-making body, and this is still considered to be its function. Its role is to oversee the implementation of decisions made by the Politburo.

The Chinese Government

The second tier of the Chinese political structure, coming under the purview of the State Council, is the entire Chinese state or governmental apparatus. If one takes a narrow definition of the State Council, one would be speaking of only those individuals within the State Council itself. This would include the Premier, Vice Premiers, State Councillors, Secretary and Deputy Secretaries General, and several directors.

But a broader definition encompassing the entire government apparatus would include not only the State Council itself, but all of China's government ministries – such as the Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Public Health. In addition, the State Council includes many special agencies and commissions, including bureaus such as the General Administration of Customs; the National Tourism Administration, the State Education Commission; the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office; and the China Welfare Fund for the Handicapped, and a number of research institutes and think-tanks, such as the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Despite its effective subordination to the Party, the government apparatus wields decisive tactical influence over policy by virtue of its role in interpreting, implementing, and overseeing what central leaders often broadly and somewhat ambiguously define as Chinese policy goals.[4]

Since he is both President of the Chinese state as well as Party Secretary, Jiang Zemin is the formal head of the Chinese state apparatus in addition to heading the Chinese Communist Party. In practice, however, it is premier Zhu Rongji who presides over and actively directs the State Council bureaucracies. In March 1998, China's central leaders announced their intent to shrink the government bureaucracy, with one of their goals being to reduce the 40 ministries of the State Council. As a result of this 4 ½ years of restructuring and reorganization, Premier Zhu announced in June 2002, the government has cut its bureaucracy by nearly 50% and reduced the number of central government and provincial employees by 1.5 million.[5]

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[4] In a conference paper presented in 1998, one scholar cited the 1982 example of then-Party Secretary Hu Yaobang's pronouncement at the 12th Party Congress that China would pursue "an independent foreign policy" and make decisions based on the merits of various international issues. It was up to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to interpret that general pronouncement and turn it into an effective, sustainable policy. Paper by Lu Ning (*The Business Times*, Singapore), entitled "Supraministry Coordinating Bodies, State Council Ministries, and Party Departments," presented at a conference, "The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform: 1978-2000," February 27-March 1, 1998.

[5] Zhu made this announcement on June 19, 2002, at a meeting of the Central Organization Committee in Beijing. According to Zhu, other reductions included the abolishment of 11 subordinate ministries of the State Council and 200 departments. An impending new round of streamlining was also discussed at the meeting. Some observers inferred that vice-president Hu Jintao's attendance at the meeting is a further sign of his imminent succession to President Jiang Zemin. Cheung, Ray. "Bureaucracy sheds 1.5 million jobs," in *South China Morning Post*, June 21, 2002.

The Military: CCP Central Military Commission

The third vertical system in Chinese governance is the People's Liberation Army (PLA), whose highest decision making body is the eleven-member Chinese Communist Party Central Military Commission (CCP CMC), with a status comparable to the Politburo Standing Committee and the State Council. It is believed to meet regularly to address routine administrative matters and to formulate policies. The CCP CMC is chaired by Jiang Zemin — a position as the head of the PLA which is almost mandatory for the Communist Party Secretary, but which Jiang may fulfill uneasily (compared to Deng) since he has no military background.[6] Jiang is thus placed in the most senior position at the top of all three vertical systems in China.

The CCP CMC is in supreme command of military and defense affairs, including the formulation of military strategy. Symbolizing the Communist Party's control of the military, it is significant that the highest military policy-making body has a Party identity. Although the CCP CMC appears to have a governmental counterpart in the parallel State Central Military Commission (SCMC) – theoretically a separate decision making body within the governmental bureaucracy – in practice, the SCMC is a relatively meaningless entity, since its eleven members are the same eleven members comprising the CCP CMC. Likewise, the Ministry of Defense, the principal state bureaucracy for dealing with foreign militaries, is considered a weaker body that is subordinate to the CCP CMC. Apart from the policy formulation and decision making roles of the CCP CMC itself, key members of that body appear also to serve a bridging function between central Communist Party leaders and the state and military pillars.[7]

Power Relationships Among Party, State, and Military

While systems of power in China appear distinct and separate, many in China's central leadership wear multiple hats, holding positions concurrently in all three vertical systems. Thus, as suggested by the table below, the influence that the military has within party or state decision making bodies may be based less on institutional relationships than on having a senior military leader sitting on the appropriate body, and vice-versa. This adds to the difficulty of knowing more about the process of Chinese decision making. In addition, even supreme decision making bodies at the highest level are hierarchical on an informal level; their members are not necessarily

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[6] Deng Xiaoping, who did have military experience and who was formerly head of the CCP CMC, relinquished its chairmanship to Jiang Zemin in 1989, after Jiang's selection as Party Secretary following the Tiananmen Square crackdown. It is thought that Deng took this step to help bolster Jiang's power base, both within the party and particularly within the military.

[7] For instance, one Chinese-language article on military leadership issues in China, in referring to CCP CMC vice-chairman Zhang Wannian, said he would "mainly be in charge of the work within the Army and, as member of the secretariat of the CCP Central Committee, will communicate the Army's internal affairs to the center and receive relevant instructions from the latter." See Kuan Cha-chia, "Beijing Holds Enlarged Meeting of Central Military Commission...," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, December 22, 1997, (FBIS online).

of equal status, but hold authority and influence derived from a range of intangible factors apart from their actual position. These intangible factors include experience, seniority, personal connections, degree of expertise, and, to some extent, their association with past "successful" policies, particularly in the economic realm. This informal power hierarchy is undoubtedly well-known to the respective parties involved, although it is not always apparent to outside observers.

The Succession Process and Current Leadership Dynamics

Although it is a broad American perception that little or no political liberalization has taken place in the PRC since 1978, PRC leaders have continued to make incremental reforms in the country's Party and government systems. These reforms have contributed to the building of political institutions and mechanisms that differ notably from those associated with the days of Chairman Mao. Among other changes, the PRC leadership has implemented the following:

- "term limits" for top-level positions in the Party and government;
- unofficial retirement age requirements for Party cadres at senior levels of leadership; regular rotation of provincial and military leaders;
- equal representation and voting status for each province on the CCP Central Committee; multiple-candidate choices for some Party and governmental seats.[8]

While these and other political reforms have brought more rationality to the political process, they have their limitations. They have not, for instance, led to the establishment of opposition political parties, opened political and policy processes to broader public debate, or provided predictable and regularized methods for selecting the next top leaders. Despite the above reforms, then, the process of political succession in the PRC is still characterized by uncertainty. Decisions on succession will be made through a combination of internal campaigning, behind-the-scenes manipulation, negotiation, and compromise among approximately 30 top senior leaders. These machinations undoubtedly have been ongoing for much of the period since 2000, and they are likely to continue and intensify as the preparatory work continues for the 16th Party Congress, expected in late 2002. Only at that point will most of the results of the process finally be made known.[9]

Variables Influencing the Succession Process

Following the state of play in PRC succession politics is a tenuous exercise at best. The interested political scientist must employ a combination of speculation and tea-leaf reading along with a high tolerance for sifting through the contradictory and

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[8] Cheng Li, Professor of Government, Hamilton College, "China's Political Succession: Four Mis-perceptions in the West," a paper delivered at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington D.C., February 21, 2001.

[9] Many of the decisions, in fact, will be finalized in the summer of 2002 at the leadership's annual summer retreat in Beidaihe.

Table 1. Key Party/Military/State Leaders in China

(rank order)

Chinese Communist Party			
Politburo (21 members) bold = Standing Comm., * = alternates	**Secretariat** (7 members)	**Central Military Commission (CMC)** (11 members) (** = Vice Chairs)	**Key State Ministers** (VP = Vice Premier) (SC= State Councillor)
Jiang Zemin (Sec)		Jiang Zemin (Chair)	Jiang Zemin (Pres)
Li Peng			
Zhu Rongji			Zhu Rongji (Premier)
Li Ruihuan			
Hu Jintao	Hu Jintao	Hu Jintao **	Hu Jintao (Vice-Pres.)
Wei Jianxing	Wei Jianxing		
Li Lanqing			Li Lanqing (VP)
Chi Haotian		Chi Haotian **	Chi Haotian (SC, DefMin)
Ding Guangen	Ding Guangen		
Huang Ju			
Jia Qinglin			
Jiang Chunyun			
Li Changchun			
Li Tieying			
Luo Gan	Luo Gan		Luo Gan (SC)
Qian Qichen			Qian Qichen (VP)
Tian Jiyun			
Wen Jiabao	Wen Jiabao		Wen Jiabao (VP)
Wu Bangguo			Wu Bangguo (VP)
Wu Guanzheng			
Zhang Wannian	Zhang Wannian	Zhang Wannian **	
Wu Yi*			Wu Yi (SC)
Zeng Qinghong*	Zeng Qinghong		
			Tang Jiaxuan (ForMin)
		Cao Gangchuan	
		Fu Quanyou	
		Guo Boxiong	
		Wang Ke	
		Wang Ruilin	
		Xu Caihou	
		Yu Yongbo	
			Ismail Amat (SC)
			Wang Zhongyu (SC)

(Shaded area = non-Politburo members.)

ever-changing press reports on the activities and decisions of current leaders. A number of variables are likely to continue influencing political succession arrangements, and awareness of their importance will provide a degree of insight into the decision making process.

Greater Constraints on Decision-Making. In the past, the Chinese Communist Party was dominated by an all-powerful single leader, such as Mao or Deng, with sufficient clout and leverage to work his will on the political process with little or no constraint. But with the passing of Mao and the other founders of the Chinese Communist Party, the decentralization of decision-making processes under Deng Xiaoping, and the greater diversity and complexity that economic reforms and other changes have brought to the Chinese social and political fabric, no single leader in China now holds such a predominant position. Chinese leadership in the "third" generation has been more nearly a collective process, requiring compromise, trade-offs, and consultation. While political machination and "factional politics" still play important roles, the diffusion of power that has occurred at the highest levels over the past decade places increasing constraints on senior leaders and has corresponding policy implications for succession arrangements.

Generational Differences. Current speculation is focusing on a collection of fourth-generation front-runners, sometimes referred to in the PRC press as "cross-century successors," for key positions. More so than in the past, China's new generation of leaders differs from predecessor generations. While they are better educated (all are university graduates), they also have had more diverse backgrounds and experiences than previous leaders, and they lack the kind of unifying political formative experience that Mao's "Long March" contemporaries had.[10] Having come of age in the political and social chaos of the Cultural Revolution, they may be more cynical about politics, more disillusioned with the historical experiences of socialism, and thus less committed to or respectful of past ideologies. They are largely products of Mao's isolationist years, and for the most part, none was educated abroad, as were many members of Mao's generation. Thus, members of the fourth generation may be more parochial and nationalistic in their views than previous leaders.

"Factional" Politics. Always a critical part of Chinese political life in the past, factional politics still plays an important role in succession arrangements. Much has been made, for instance, of the so-called "Shanghai Faction" of central government leaders with close connections to or roots in Shanghai. This group is headed by Jiang Zemin and includes Zeng Qinghong, Jiang's closest advisor, and Vice-Premier Wu Bangguo (see biographies at the end of this report). Other than regional ties, factional identities are defined by university ties, family ties, "mentor-mentee" relationships, and past institutional affiliations. Conventional wisdom has it that members of a faction will help each other's careers, put one another into positions of power, and conspire to keep other factions from gaining ascendency. Current leaders who may be stepping down may continue to be able to wield influence if they can elevate members of their own factions to senior positions of

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[10] The Long March refers to the Red Army's year-long, 6,000-mile retreat from Chiang Kai-shek's forces in 1934. Starting in Jiangxi Province with about 86,000 men and women, the army reached its final destination in Yan'an one year later with 4,000 survivors.

power. In the PRC of the twenty-first century, however, some observers stress that no single faction now can dominate the political process as was the case in the past.

Corruption. Rampant official corruption within Party, state, and military apparatuses also has implications for leadership succession arrangements. PRC leaders are under increasing public pressure to crack down on corruption, and senior officials who are publicly linked to graft, bribery, or other corruption scandals are unlikely to advance and may be subject to discipline.[11] Moreover, official corruption at lower leadership levels may inflict collateral damage on leaders at more senior levels. This is thought to be true in the case of senior leader Li Peng, one of whose protégées, Cheng Kejie, (former Vice Chairman of the National People's Congress) was executed for corrupt practices in 2000. Moreover, uncovering and publicizing corruption may even serve as a tactical tool among factions contending for leadership positions.

Leaders Who May Step Down in 2002/2003

Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, Vice-Premier Li Peng, and Premier Zhu Rongji – the top three in the PRC leadership – are all slated to step down in 2002 and 2003, respectively, from their current positions. Their departure would be in keeping with relatively recent internal "term limitations" the PRC leadership has set out for itself: an agreement apparently made at the 15th Party Congress in 1997 that leaders should step down after reaching age 70 (a policy pushed at the time by Jiang Zemin); and an internal dictum reputed to have been put forward by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s that no senior leader should serve more than two terms in his position.[12] In addition, the PRC's Constitution specifies that senior state officials (as opposed to Party officials) shall serve no more than two consecutive terms.[13] Not only are China's three senior leaders slated to step down from their present offices, they are also thought to be relinquishing their positions on the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee and on the Politburo itself.

Observers of political developments in China watch Politburo membership closely for clues as to who may be ascendant to senior leadership positions in the future. There is much – and varied – speculation about who among current leaders may be rising and who may not. According to a special news report from Hong Kong in April 2001, for instance, the Politburo Standing Committee at that time approved a list of new Politburo Standing Committee members that had been put forward by a special committee of senior leaders charged with making plans for the 16th Party

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[11] According to a Hong Kong news report, the CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection early in 2001 was investigating 21 senior officials for corruption. (Hong Kong *Kuang Chiao Ching* in Chinese, March 16, 2001, translated in FBIS online.)

[12] Although Zhu Rongji will have served only one five-year term as Premier by 2003, he has passed the unofficial age limit for continuance in power. Periodically, he has reaffirmed publicly his commitment to step down after just one term.

[13] Constitution of the People's Republic of China – 1992. Article 79 specifies term limits for the state President and Vice-president. Article 66 specifies similar limits for the Chairman of the National People's Congress.

Congress.[14] According to the April 2001 report, the new list indicated that Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, Li Peng, and Li Ruihuan would all be stepping down from the Politburo, the Standing Committee, and their leadership positions at the next Party Congress, leaving only Hu Jintao, Wei Jianxing, and Li Lanqing remaining. The four new Standing Committee members listed as replacements were Wen Jiabao, Luo Gan, Wu Bangguo – all three already Politburo members – and Zeng Qinghong, currently a Politburo alternate. The Politburo's apparent approval of the new leadership list led some to conclude that succession arrangements were proceeding smoothly and without much controversy from within the Party.

News reports in the summer of 2002, however, suggested that leadership negotiations not only were continuing but were becoming increasingly difficult. Many western observers speculated that Jiang was maneuvering to stay on as head of the Central Military Commission and was attempting to secure the support of senior military officials for this.[15] Others believed that Jiang was even trying to serve one more term as Party Secretary, although his aspirations to do so do not appear to be supported by other Politburo Standing Committee members.[16]

Some have suggested that senior leaders may try to resolve their succession differences by agreeing to switch jobs in a political game of musical chairs.[17] They say that senior leaders may, for instance, argue that China has a special need now for consistent leadership given the present difficulties in U.S.-China relations and perceived domestic challenges such as the Falun Gong, relations with Taiwan, and WTO accession. There has also been speculation that senior leaders may be exploring the notion of trying to temporarily extend their current terms for one year or possibly more.[18]

Jiang Zemin. Currently holding the senior positions in China's three political tiers – as Party Secretary, State President, and CMC Chairman – Jiang is serving his second term in all three positions. Born in 1926, Jiang studied engineering at Shanghai Jiaotong University, and later trained in the Soviet Union for a brief period. In 1989, at the time of the Tiananmen demonstrations, Jiang was serving as Secretary

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[14] Hsiao Peng, "Four New Politburo Standing Committee Members to Replace Four Old Ones," in *Hong Kong Sing Tao Jih Pao*, in Chinese, translated in FBIS, April 19, 2001.

[15] Hsia Wen-szu, "Struggle between Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji at Beidaihe meeting viewed," *Hong Kong Kai Fang*, in Chinese, September 5, 2000, translated in FBIS online.

[16] Lam, Willy Wo-Lap, "Beijing debates how long Jiang's power should last," *South China Morning Post*, February 16, 2000, p. 19.

[17] Interview with Dr. Carol Hamrin, George Mason University, March 8, 2001.

[18] The uncertainties in predicting China's political succession arrangements are reflected in news report headlines over a two-week period in September 2002: "China's Jiang Is Likely To Retain Top Spots, Impeding Power Shift," in *Wall Street Journal*, September 4; "China's Leader Won't Hold On, Anonymous Author Says," in *New York Times*, September 5; "China – The Succession – Jiang Finds It Hard To Let Go," in *Far Eastern Economic Review,* September 12; "Jiang To Keep A Decisive Role In China, Lee Kuan Yew Says," in *International Herald Tribune,* September 17; "Jiang Poised For Historic Retirement," *Reuters*, September 18.

of the Shanghai Communist Party municipal committee. His low-key handling of similar democracy demonstrations at the time in Shanghai was widely praised at the time, and catapulted him to senior national leadership positions. He was elected General Party Secretary in June 1989, and elected chairman of the CMC in November 1989. His connections with Shanghai, and his patronage of others with that connection, has led to his being dubbed the leader of the "Shanghai Faction."

By modern Chinese standards, Jiang has served a long time in his leadership roles. The jury is out as to his future after the 16th Party Congress. Some reports suggest that he may be trying to retain at least one of his positions – as CMC chairman, is most often suggested – while others claim he will be stepping down from all of his positions including the Politburo Standing Committee.[19] According to one school of thought, Jiang would like to emulate Deng Xiaoping and remain predominantly influential as a retired elder senior statesman. This would be facilitated if Jiang could be assured that several of his protegees would be elevated to senior levels – and in fact, a number of the fourth generation front-runners have strong Jiang connections.

But speculation about Jiang's continuing influence illustrates the difficulties in predicting the future course of PRC leadership decisions. He has had trouble promoting his most trusted advisor and protegee, Zeng Qinghong, to the Politburo Standing Committee – a necessary step if Zeng is to advance in the leadership. Some news reports late in 2000 speculated that this represented a serious political setback to Jiang and a challenge to his Party control.[20] More recently, Zeng's name has been put forward on some lists of potential new Politburo members, but not consistently, suggesting that Jiang still has not solved whatever problem he has with other Standing Committee members. In another uncertainty, some have suggested that Jiang has staked his personal prestige on successfully stamping out the Falun Gong spiritual movement – a policy that some feel is not widely supported by other senior leaders – and that failure to do so may adversely affect him in some way.

Another factor in Jiang's political maneuvering may be his desire to ensure his historical legacy by having the Party formally adopt in its charter his own political theories, putting him in the same league as his predecessors, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Jiang's political contribution, dubbed the "Three Represents," is that the Chinese Communist Party represents not only the "fundamental interests of all the people," but also "advanced culture" and "advanced productive forces"– in other words, capitalists. This would be a fundamental departure from past Party theories.

Li Peng. Born in 1929, Li Peng is the senior leader most strongly identified with the Tiananmen Square crackdown of June 1989. In addition to his being the

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[19] While there is much speculation that Jiang would like to remain CMC Chairman, some specialists believe this an impossibility unless he also remains a PSC member.

[20] According to an October 2000 report in an English-language Hong Kong newspaper, *The South China Morning Post*, five of the seven Politburo Standing Committee members expressed reservations about promoting Zeng. A Chinese language report of December 6, 2000, in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, speculated that the failure to promote Zeng meant that Jiang was losing a measure of control over the Politburo.

only current Standing Committee member serving in that same capacity at the time, he was the Chinese official who announced the declaration of martial law on May 19, 1989, prior to the crackdown itself. He served as Premier for two five-year terms beginning in 1988 under Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, then continuing under Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin in 1989. Li studied in the Soviet Union and is considered politically and economically conservative. His field is hydroelectric engineering, and he has served in a series of government positions involving the electric power industry. In 1998, he was elected to a five-year term as chairman of the National People's Congress, a position he still holds.

Although clearly a survivor and a force to be reckoned with, Li has never been among the most beloved of Chinese leaders, and he has had trouble in recent years. As an electric power specialist, he served his entire professional life in the power industry. He is considered to be the principal proponent of the controversial Three Gorges Dam project, and is thus vulnerable to increasing criticisms about that project's association with corruption, quality control problems, and unpopular massive population relocation program. In addition, some of his protegees and associates have been linked to corruption scandals – most notably, the former vice-chairman of the National People's Congress, Cheng Kejie, who was executed in 2000 for corrupt practices. His difficulties have implications for those associated with him who may hope to ascend to more senior positions.

Zhu Rongji. Born in 1928, Premier Zhu Rongji is an electrical engineering graduate of Qinghua University. As mayor of Shanghai beginning in 1987, Zhu for several years worked closely with Jiang Zemin before the latter's transfer to Beijing in 1989. Zhu is closely associated with pragmatic macroeconomic programs. When he was Vice-premier of the State Council in the early 190s, Zhu was credited with bringing rampant inflation under control. He became Premier and thus technical head of the government in 1998, and has the reputation of being a strict taskmaster intolerant of what one biography referred to as a "dilatory work style." In addition to efforts to downsize and improve the efficiency of the state bureaucratic structure, Zhu's principle cares as Premier have been his attempts to reform China's ailing state-owned-enterprises, bring China into the World Trade Organization, and improve China's fragile banking system.

Potential Successors

Within the fourth generation, a number of younger leaders in particular have often been mentioned as leading contenders for the top leadership positions. All are already serving in powerful positions, with most currently members of the Politburo, and they are likely to stay on the scene in important capacities regardless of the eventual decisions made about top leadership posts.

Hu Jintao. Vice-President Hu Jintao is widely considered the likely candidate to succeed Jiang Zemin – both as Party Secretary in 2002, and as President of the country in 2003. The 59-year old Hu is the only person in the Chinese leadership, other than Jiang himself, who currently holds senior positions on all three key decision-making bodies at the Party, state, and military levels. Other than Jiang, Hu is the only other civilian leader on the Central Military Commission. (See **Table 1**.)

While little is known about Hu Jintao in the West, he has been on a leadership track for over a decade. An engineering graduate of Qinghua University, he has a background with the Communist Youth League (an important credential), and has served twice as Provincial Party Secretary for difficult postings: beginning in 1985 in Guizhou Province, one of China's poorest; and beginning in 1988, at age 46, for the Tibet Autonomous Region following the outbreak of Tibetan protests against Chinese rule. In the latter posting, according to his official profile, he "implemented a tough policy to suppress the Tibet independence movement...."[21] In 1993, Hu replaced Qiao Shi as president of the Central Party School. He became Vice-President of the PRC in 1998.

Historically it has been dangerous in China to be a designated successor-in-waiting. Few men in this position in PRC history have attained the top spot without incident.[22] While it appears that current senior leaders broadly support Hu in his position as imminent successor to Jiang Zemin, some articles and commentators have suggested that Jiang himself would much prefer maneuvering his own protégé, Zeng Qinghong, into the top Party spot.[23] Knowledgeable observers in China suggest that Hu's safest course may be to keep a low profile and avoid making "mistakes" prior to the 16th Party Congress.[24] This may be one reason that Hu has been nearly invisible during the crises in U.S.-China relations in recent years. But others suggest that Hu's minimal appearances on China's foreign policy stage may not be so much a defensive tactic as a hint that he may be a relative political lightweight. Among his limited official overseas travel has been his sole visit to the United States, made in April-May 2002. Hu met with a wide range of senior U.S. officials during his visit and, by most accounts, made a good impression, although no policy initiatives were announced or expected.

Wen Jiabao. In addition to his state position as Vice-Premier, Wen Jiabao, age 59, is a member of the Party Politburo and the Party Secretariat. Although not

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[21] *Hong Kong Ming Pao*, in Chinese, translated in FBIS, March 18, 1998.

[22] In 1959, Liu Shaoqi, was named Mao's replacement as state President, but was later arrested, vilified, and died in disgrace in 1969; at the Party congress in 1969, Lin Biao was declared Mao's successor, only to be accused in 1971 of plotting to assassinate Mao; Lin died in a plane crash fleeing China. In 1976, Hua Guofeng became supreme leader, having allegedly been chosen by Mao on his deathbed; several years later, he was effectively deposed by Deng Xiaoping. In 1981, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, dual successors chosen by Deng Xiaoping, became Party Secretary and Premier, respectively. Hu was ousted in 1987, charged with mishandling student demonstrations; Zhao, who became Party Secretary upon Hu's ouster (Zhao was replaced as Premier by Li Peng) fell from power during the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 and was replaced by Jiang Zemin..

[23] "Unattributed 'special report' says power struggle relating to 16th CCP Party Congress (2002) personnel issues a main theme of Beidaihe mtng," *Tokyo Sentaku*, in Japanese, translated in FBIS, August 1, 2000, pp. 6-9.

[24] In the lead-up to a change of leadership in the PRC, many things can become "mistakes." A "mistake" might be: not taking a correct line on an issue of political consequence; creating an impression of failure to fulfill the responsibilities of one's current job; being associated with a controversial position or individual; or anything else that might lend itself to manipulation by one's political competitors.

currently on the Politburo Standing Committee, his name has consistently been reported to be on various circulating lists of potential new members for 2002.[25] If he achieves this, he is thought to be a leading candidate in contention for the position of Premier to replace Zhu Rongji in 2003. His responsibilities in government, which include agriculture and finance, would make him particularly qualified for this position.

Wen is a graduate of the Beijing Institute of Geology and did post-graduate work at that institute. According to a profile of him in *Hong Kong Hsin Pao (Hong Kong Economic Journal)*, Wen was a director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee in 1989, working under then Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang, at the time of the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989.[26] His reported advocacy of a "peaceful approach" to the Tiananmen student movement at the time led to some reports that he may have been politically marginalized early in the 1990s, and to the suggestion that Jiang Zemin may distrust his ideological credentials. But his continued ascension in the PRC leadership since then has pegged him as a political survivor with what have been called exceptional "factional skills."

Wu Bangguo. Age 59, Wu Bangguo graduated from the radio-electronics department of Qinghua University. Part of the so-called "Shanghai Faction,"he worked with Jiang Zemin in Shanghai during the 1980s, and he became a Politburo member in 1992. Some early Hong Kong news reports pegged Wu as the front-runner to replace Zhu Rongji as Premier in 2003, but no similar reports have been noted in the past two years.[27] Instead, more recent news coverage about possible Politburo Standing Committee deliberations suggests that some may doubt Wu's experience for the job. Wu's name was included as one of the four new potential Standing Committee members in the April 2001 report about the 16th Party Congress preparatory committee's deliberations, and he is included on two of the four more recent lists of candidates released in November 2001.[28] His elevation to the Standing Committee could place him in contention for a top leadership spot.

Li Changchun. Age 57, Li Changchun is the Secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Communist Party Committee and is described as being among those close to Jiang Zemin. Early on in the succession process, Li was occasionally named as a potential successor to Jiang in the position of Party Secretary. Since then, his star seems to have faded, and his name was not included on the list of new potential members of the Politburo Standing Committee – an essential step for a more senior leadership role.[29] Some have suggested that Li's advancement has been opposed by some senior leaders on the grounds that he did not sufficiently boost Guangdong's economy during his tenure. In addition, Li is one of those whose fortunes may have been tainted through his alleged association with corruption scandals. In particular,

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[25] Hsiao Peng, April 19, 2001.

[26] *Hong Kong Hsin Pao*, in Chinese, translated in FBIS, August 30, 2000.

[27] Lam, Willy Wo-lap, "'Dark Horse' on Fast Track to Top," *Hong Kong South China Morning Post*, in English, March 17, 1999, p. 23.

[28] Hsiao Peng, April 19, 2001; *Hong Kong Cheng Ming*, December 1, 2001.

[29] Ibid.

according to one news report, this includes scandals involving the vice mayor of Shenyang City in Liaoning Province, who is described as having "connections" to Li Changchun and as being a member of Li's faction.[30]

Zeng Qinghong. Zeng Qinghong is Jiang Zemin's principle protegee and, according to reports, is the only person Jiang brought with him to Beijing when he left Shanghai to assume the position of Party Secretary in 1989. As key adviser to Jiang and the head of the Central Committee Organization Department (similar to a Ministry of Personnel), Zeng is viewed as being a potential rival to Hu Jintao for control of the Communist Party. On the other hand, Jiang Zemin has not yet succeeded in getting his protegee promoted from his current position as an alternate on the Party Politburo to the Politburo Standing Committee or even to full Politburo membership – a critical step if he is to advance in future leadership decisions. Some press reports have suggested that Zeng, with Jiang's support, is maneuvering behind the scenes to limit Hu's power. But to date, his failure to reach the Politburo suggests that there remains significant opposition to his advancement from senior levels in the Chinese political system.

Luo Gan. The only protégée of Li Peng considered to have a chance at elevation to the Standing Committee, Politburo member Luo Gan currently serves as chairman of the Central Committee for the Comprehensive Management of Public Order. As such, he is chiefly responsible for the implementation of the latest "Strike Hard" anti-crime campaign, announced in April 2001.

According to an official biography, Luo Gan is one of the only potential successors who studied abroad – in Leipzig, East Germany. A native of Shandong Province, he has held posts as provincial Party Secretary in Henan Province, vice president of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, Minister of Labor, and secretary general of the State Council General Office – holding the latter position for 10 years. Over the past year, he has been mentioned as a potential candidate for promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee on both the April 2001 list and in all four of the November 2001 alternate lists.[31]

Implications for U.S. Policy

A new generation of PRC leaders, whether those individuals profiled here or others, presents a new set of challenges for U.S. policymakers and suggests two possible policy scenarios. Well-educated and by all accounts politically astute, China's fourth generation is a product of Mao's insular, isolationist years. They have also matured politically at a time, during the 1990s, of continued Sino-U.S. difficulties over Taiwan, trade, human rights, and other contentious issues. Thus, Washington policymakers may have to deal with a Beijing government that is more

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[30] Hiroki Fujita, "Jiang Zemin groping for 'Deng Xiaoping-type rule by cloistered emperor,'" – power struggle intensifying with approach of the Party Congress in the Fall next year," *Tokyo Foresight* in Japanese March 1, 2001, pp. 32-33. Translated in FBIS online, JPP20010320000056.

[31] Hsiao Peng, Ibid, April 2001.

nationalistic in its views of how to solve China's problems. New PRC leaders may be less likely to look to the West for political or economic models, and so less interested in seeking out or valuing U.S. contact and cooperation than their predecessors in Beijing. Yet they may be politically disillusioned as well with their own tumultuous experiences with socialism. As a result, they may be more willing to experiment with untried ideologies or methods, making it more difficult for American policymakers to predict the future course of Chinese policy. Over the near term, communication and understanding may become more problematic between American policy-makers who stress values and moral issues and China's fourth-generation culture of non-ideological technocrats and problem-solvers. In combination, these potential circumstances may make U.S.-China relations even more problematic, convincing elements on both sides that the United States and China share few common interests and that the other is not to be trusted.

On the other hand, ideologues in the American political process appear to have been temporarily marginalized by the more pragmatic U.S. political demands of the global anti-terrorism campaign. Geopolitical realists in the Bush Administration therefore may find some communion with the pragmatic problem-solvers that make up much of China's fourth generation leadership contenders. When combined with the events of September 11 and with new American policy priorities, China's impending transition to a new generation of leaders could strengthen the hand of those in the American policy process who have argued that the "engagement" policy of the past ten years is a productive and appropriate approach toward the PRC. In such an environment, it would seem difficult for the Bush Administration any time soon to resurrect the "strategic competitor" approach toward China that it articulated when it first assumed office. Washington may see China's leadership transition period as an opportunity to move the relationship forward into more positive territory. In addition, U.S. officials may be persuaded to maintain a low profile partly to minimize chances that the United States itself could become a factor in China's political succession, since it is widely thought that no PRC official who hopes to benefit in the succession process can be seen as being "soft" in dealing with Washington during difficult times.

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