



ORGANISATION FOR RESEARCH ON  
**CHINA AND ASIA**

# THE 'PRINCE' AND ALL HIS MEN

PREDICTING PERSONNEL  
CHANGES IN THE 20TH NPC

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# FOREWORD

BY EERISHIKA PANKAJ, DIRECTOR, ORCASIA



On the 16th of October 2022, China's senior most leaders are set to assemble at Beijing's Great Hall of the People for the 20th National Party Congress (NPC) of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The historic importance of the NPC has been well-documented, but the 20th NPC will cement a special place in Chinese history.

Poised to mark the start of an unprecedented third term as General Secretary of the CPC and Chair of the Central Military Commission (CMC) for Xi Jinping, the future evolution of the Party leadership, already decided behind closed doors, will be revealed at the event meant more as a communication platform.

The Party leadership has been filled by Xi over the past nine years with individuals he has had prior personal and professional relationships. Majority of these loyalists are either Shaanxi natives or subordinates from the provinces he previously served as Party Secretary such as Shanghai, Zhejiang or Fujian.

Childhood friends like Vice Premier Liu He and Vice Chairman Zhang Youxia of the CMC have also served critical roles since Xi's ascendance to power. Now, both Liu and Zhang are set to retire; this is also true for other loyalists/allies like Standing Committee members Li Zhanshu as well

as Han Zheng. Holders of key State positions such as Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi are also beyond their retirement age. As two (excluding Xi) members of the Standing Committee and nine members of the Politburo are set to retire, with important vacancies opening up in the economic, diplomatic and military sectors, the 20th NPC is set to shape the next five - if not ten - years of Chinese governance.

These domestic changes will also be critical to assessing Beijing's foreign policy for the coming years. Before analysing the latter, this project by ORCA seeks to provide a methodology driven prediction of upcoming appointments to the Standing Committee and Politburo. Spearheaded by Rahul Karan Reddy, the project has been in the works for months.

This report and other subsequent deliverables pertaining to the NPC have drawn from research conducted on variables such as age, factional loyalty, educational qualification and leadership experience in assessing the next generation of China's leaders.

The 18th NPC in 2012 legitimised Xi's power; the 19th NPC broke from tradition to retain Xi as helmsman with no announcement of a successor and the 20th NPC appears to follow the theme of continuity in ensuring the supreme authority of Xi within the Party. Even as the ultimate decisions and thinking remains shrouded in secrecy --or the will of one man --this project allows a deeper dive into the CPC's internal politics for the avid China researcher and scholar, holding longevity both in value and output.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The report has drawn from several publicly available resources and research works by institutions and individuals. Insights presented in this report are also a function of consultations and interviews with eminent scholars in the field of China studies.

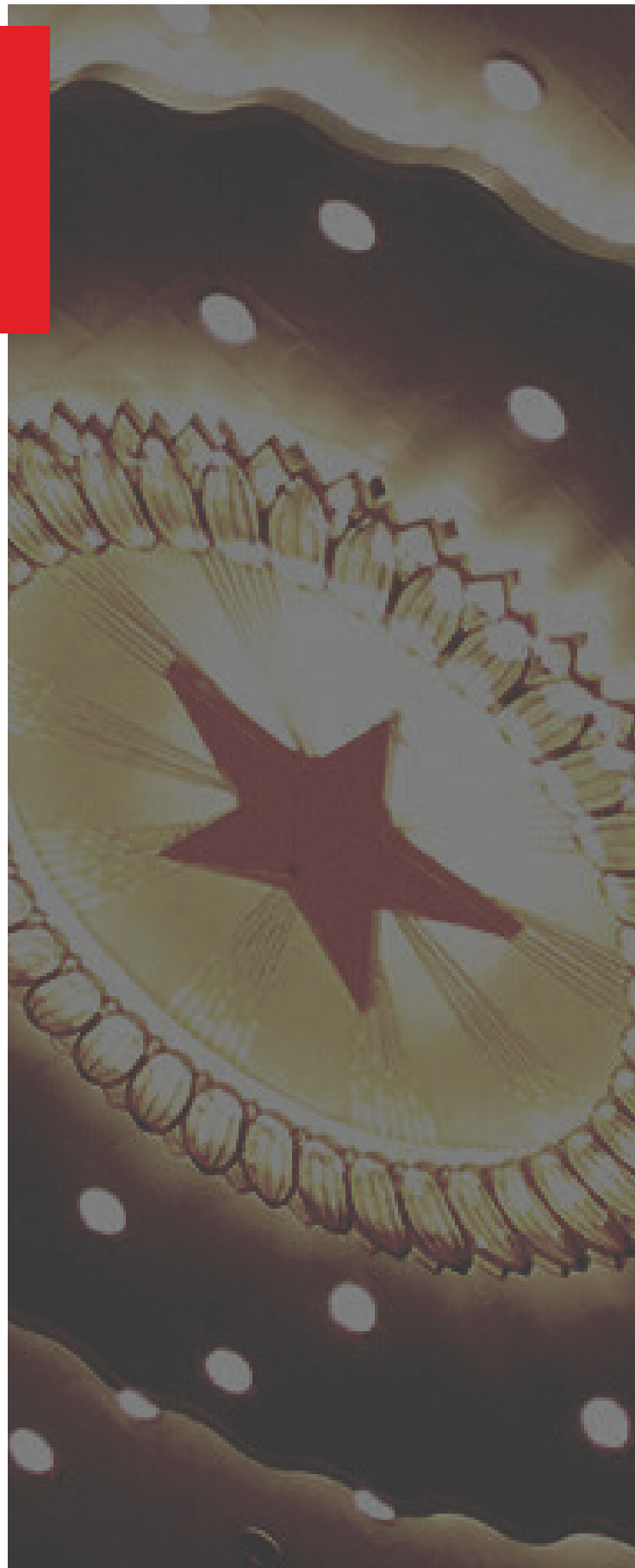
I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Bali Deepak, Professor and Chairperson of the Center of Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies at Jawaharlal National University (JNU) for his insights and patience. I would also like to thank Hem Kumar Jain, formerly a Distinguished Fellow at Center at Contemporary China Studies (CCCS) for his comments that helped shape our outputs.

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**Rahul Karan Reddy**  
Research Associate, ORCA





This report is a detailed assessment of the 20th National Party Congress scheduled to take place in October 2022 that will decide the future of China's top leadership. Assessments made here are based on a methodology that applies several criteria to predict personnel appointments.

The predictions were made after consultations with experts and scholars with experience in internal Chinese politics. It is important to note at the onset that predicting personnel appointments within the Communist Party of China (CPC) has no guarantees. Hence, a comprehensive methodology is required to assess candidates for promotion to top positions.

The **first section** of the report details the significance of this Party Congress and analyses developments in the build-up to the event.

The **second section** lays out the methodology applied to predict personnel appointments and outlines the caveats that apply to such an analysis.

The **third section** is a prediction of the various personnel appointments to the Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo.

The report **concludes** with an assessment of the implications of the 20th NPC for the Party and the impact it will have on Chinese foreign policy.

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PART I:  
DECODING THE 20TH NPC'S  
ROLE IN HISTORY

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# UNDERSTANDING THE NPC

The stage is set for the most important political event in modern Chinese politics, with the 20th National Party Congress (NPC) scheduled to be held on 16th October 2022 (Munroe and Yew). The event, which takes place in the backdrop of challenges both domestic and international, is viewed as the most significant in decades for China, especially as Xi Jinping is anticipated to win a historic third term and spearhead changes in the country's top leadership. The 20th NPC will provide a clear indication of how China plans to manoeuvre the next five years, with Xi's ambitions for and approach to the military, diplomacy and economy being translated into appointments in the Central Committee (CC) in the form of his most trusted aides.

The NPC is held once every five years to reorganise the highest ranks of the Communist Party of China, in accordance with Article 19 of the Party Constitution (Constitution of Communist Party of China, Ch. 3, Art. 19). Preparations for the event involve the careful selection of 2,300 deputies who will select (approve) a new Central Committee (CC) on the last day of the Congress ("Committee Issues Notice"). The incoming 20th Committee is a grouping of the Party's most important personnel who then convene two days after the Party Congress for the Committee's first pl-

-enum to approve membership to China's highest decision-making bodies: the Politburo, Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), Central Military Commission (CMC), Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) and the Secretariat. Along with personnel appointments, the Party Congress will also see CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping deliver a political work report that summarises the performance of the outgoing Central Committee (19th CC) and NPC deputies will debate proposed amendments to the Party Constitution (Johnson).

The 20th NPC is the most important event in China's politics since Xi Jinping's accession to the post of General Secretary in 2013 and will shape the next decade of Party politics in Xi Jinping's image. Most importantly, the Party Congress will determine if Xi Jinping continues to serve as the General Secretary for a third term, a foregone conclusion for most analysts of Chinese politics.

In such a scenario, as Xi becomes the General Secretary for a third time, it would mark a clear departure from the custom that restricted the General Secretary's appointment to two terms. This practice was established by Deng Xiaoping to check the autocratic tendencies that characterised Mao Zedong's leadership of the Party. Deng Xiaoping and his associates worked to prevent "the overconcentr-

-ation of power" by establishing fixed terms of office, term limits, and a mandatory retirement age (Shirk). Such actions were taken to decentralise power, normalise political life, and restrain absolute power in the hands of one person.

The regular, peaceful leadership succession practised by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao served as the focal point of the institutionalisation process. The most significant factor in China's "authoritarian resilience" has been recognised as its premortem leadership succession, which is an exceptional feat in a communist government (Shirk). Xi, however, has changed this, moving away from a long period of institutionalised group leadership.

A third term for Xi Jinping as 'pilot at the helm' is comparable to Mao Zedong's status as 'great helmsman', signalling the importance of Xi Jinping to China's present and future ("Communique of 5th Plenary Session"). Xi Jinping has already departed from conventions relevant to the top leadership post by abolishing term limits for the President of PRC and incorporating Xi Jinping Thought (习近平思想) into the party (and state) constitution, becoming the only leader since Mao to have an eponymous ideology included in the constitution whilst still in office (BBC).

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**"THE 20TH NPC WILL PROVIDE A CLEAR INDICATION OF HOW CHINA PLANS TO MANOEUVRE THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, WITH XI'S AMBITIONS FOR AND APPROACH TO THE MILITARY, DIPLOMACY AND ECONOMY BEING TRANSLATED INTO APPOINTMENTS IN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (CC) IN THE FORM OF HIS MOST TRUSTED AIDES."**

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The 20th Party Congress is about institutions as much as it is about one individual. Decisions about appointments to the Central Committee, the Politburo and Standing Committee would already have been made at the Beidaihe meeting in mid-August (Cunningham). Nonetheless, outcomes of the lobbying and jockeying at Beidaihe will become apparent and formalised at the closing stages of the Party Congress when membership to the new Central Committee, Politburo, PSC and CMC is revealed.

The composition of the 20th CC will determine the character of China's highest decision-making bodies, revealing the balance of power between factions, organisations and ideologies within the Party that will influence China's most important institution and its decisions. Given the high replacement rate of the previous Party Congress (around 60%), analysts expect a similar turnover of personnel at the 20th Party Congress (around 50%) (Li). The continued high replacement rate suggests a sustained shift in the balance of power between factions in favour of Xi Jinping and a consolidation of policy preferences and ideological principles that direct policy decisions.

The 20th Party Congress is likely to further tip the balance in favour of Xi

and his allies within the Party, making it relatively easier to devise and execute policies that align with Xi's vision for China's future. This could also mean the distinction between functions of the state and party are blurred further, eroding the authority of state agencies in favour of Party organs (Thomas). An extraordinary battle against official corruption and Party indiscipline was launched during Xi's first term. He purged his rivals through this crackdown, which also cleaned up the CPC by catching tigers and flies. Several high-profile Party members have been purged: Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Sun Zhengcai, and Ling Jihua (Deepak). Such manoeuvres only further underscore the extent of uncertainty involved in predicting the next move of the CPC –or more specifically, Xi.

The importance of the 20th Party Congress cannot be understated given the generational transition set to occur within the Party. The high replacement rate of personnel will open up leadership positions to a younger generation of CPC members. Party members born in the 1960s, who constitute 40% of the current Alternate CC are likely to become a significant part of the Full CC, which is currently dominated by members born in the 1950s (74%). Members born in the 1970s who constitute only 1% of the Alternate CC are also expect-

-ted to figure more prominently in the 20th Central Committee (Reddy).

The admission of leaders from the 1960s and 1970s into the 20th Central Committee represents the transition between two generations of Chinese leaders who grew up in distinct eras of Chinese politics (Li). In this context, the significance of norms governing the appointment of personnel based on seniority and age is heightened by the expectation on the Party Center to facilitate a generational transition while maintaining the current style and approach to decision making. Crucially, appointments made at the Party Congress will reveal the readiness of the Party Center to strike a balance between introducing new blood into the Party and retaining senior personnel at the highest level. The personnel appointments could generate resentment among younger cadres if the Party decides to contravene the age-limit restrictions in a way that does not make way for younger leaders. This concern is brought to the forefront as a result of a recent Party directive notifying cadres that age will not be the only consideration while appointing personnel at the 20th Party Congress (“Resolution of Central Committee”).

Another factor that lends importance to this Party Congress is the dent to the trend of institutionalisation, particularly in the succession process that governed leadership transitions in China over the last four decades. The informal succession process initiated by Deng Xiaoping to formalise leadership transitions at the highest level was brought into question as a result of Xi Jinping’s decision not to declare a successor in 2017 (BBC). The absence of an appoin-

-ted successor has thrown into question the stability derived from having an established and acknowledged process to guide the Party and cadres through a leadership transition. Assuming the continuation of Xi Jinping’s tenure and the absence of an heir in 2022, the Party will have to emphasise the idea of drawing stability from continuity. The Party is likely to justify the importance of continuity, arguing that stability from a unified and centralised authority that decides succession at the appropriate moment is ideal (“Xi Jinping Stresses Stability”). Moreover, achieving national rejuvenation is a stated goal, reiterated at the 6th Plenum of the 19th Central Committee and in the historical resolution, that could justify Xi’s centrality to the Party.

This Party Congress will also continue to make departures from its initial composition and stated representativeness. Since Jiang Zemin’s announcement in 2001 to accept private businessmen into the Party, party organs like the Central Committee have gradually reflected the importance of businessmen and capitalists with experience in the private sector and capital markets (Pomfret). The new Central Committee will continue to include party members with experience in private businesses and international trade, along with personnel with expertise in key sectors like aerospace and financial markets (Huang and Henderson). Technocrats will figure prominently as members selected for higher office. Their inclusions into the Central Committee, Politburo and PSC could sideline members that traditionally composed the highest decision-making bodies like peasants, workers and soldiers.

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**PART II:  
BETWEEN ALLEGIANCE AND  
LOYALTY**

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China's top leaders Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, returned to the public spotlight on 17th August after a two-week absence from the headlines and frontpages of Chinese mainstream media (Hadano). The conspicuous absence of Xi Jinping from state media, which generally reports on his activity on a daily basis, ended with a visit to Liaoning and also marked the end of the Beidaihe meeting, during which the CPC top echelon remains absent from public eye (Li).

Interestingly, Li Keqiang was reported to have visited Shenzhen in the South (Zheng et al). Both appearances reveal the possible differences in approach to governance that each leader wants to endorse. For instance, Xi Jinping's visit to Liaoshen Campaign Memorial in Jinzhou highlighted the revolutionary spirit of the Party that won people's support and was one of three decisive campaigns in the CPC's fight against the Kuomintang. The visit to Jinzhou could be a reminder to Party cadres that the legitimacy of the Party is tied to the revolutionary struggle of the Party against its adversaries. His visit to Shenyang the next day ended with a meeting with officers above the senior colonel level, underlining the support of the military that Xi enjoys as General Secretary (Li). On the same day, the Central Committee journal, Qiushi, also published an article by Xi Jinping instructing the Party to implement the

new development concept and focus on 'common prosperity' (Wei).

On the other hand, Li Keqiang's visit to the city of Shenzhen in Guangdong was indicative of the importance that the Premier attached to the economic performance of China's key provinces for the country's future. The Premier was perhaps reiterating the primacy of reform, maintaining that 'reform and opening up will continue to advance' and that the 'Yellow river and Yangtze river will not flow backward' (Huifeng and Wong). His visit to Deng Xiaoping Memorial Park was a reminder of the historic process that was responsible for the transformation of China. The variation in the emphasis of both visits is perhaps revealing of the political or policy differences between the two leaders.

Other developments leading up to the Party Congress are worth analyzing to assess the outcomes of the Congress. For instance, on August 19th, Xiao Jianhua was sentenced to 13 years in jail for illegally absorbing public deposits and bribery ("China Sentences Xiao Jianhua"). Xiao Jianhua is considered to be the financier of multiple factions within the Party and his trial serves as a deterrent to Party members who may be considering a power play before the Party Congress. The timing of the sentencing could be a signal for Party

leaders and factions to fall in line with Xi Jinping's directives. In a similar attempt to silence detractors within the Party, the General Office of the Central Committee issued instructions to Party elders in May, warning them not to make negative political speeches and avoid using their former position to seek benefits for themselves or others (Nakazawa). The instruction to Party elders warns against undermining Xi Jinping's political and policy directives in the build up to the Party Congress.

To remind the Party and others of Xi Jinping's core position within the Party, the mainstream media in China over the past few months has highlighted the 'Two Establishes' (两个确立). The 'Two Establishes' phrase directs the Party to establish Xi Jinping at the core of the Central Committee and the Party, and his ideas as the way forward for China's future.

Though the phrase was not employed frequently between 2017 and 2021, it reappeared prominently since the 6th Plenum in 2021, featuring in more than 120 articles in the People's Daily between November 2021 and August 2022 (Bandurski). These developments reiterate the centrality of Xi Jinping to the Party's future, signalling his continued primacy within the Party after October 2022.

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**"THE 'TWO ESTABLISHES' PHRASE DIRECTS THE PARTY TO ESTABLISH XI JINPING AT THE CORE OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND THE PARTY, AND HIS IDEAS AS THE WAY FORWARD FOR CHINA'S FUTURE. "**

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**"THE VARIATION IN THE EMPHASIS OF BOTH VISITS IS PERHAPS REVEALING OF THE POLITICAL OR POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS [XI JINPING AND LI KEQIANG]."**

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**"THE TIMING OF [XIAO JIANHUA] THE SENTENCING COULD BE A SIGNAL FOR PARTY LEADERS AND FACTIONS TO FALL IN LINE WITH XI JINPING'S DIRECTIVES."**

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# METHODOLOGY

To make an informed assessment of the appointment of personnel, a comprehensive methodology that considers several criteria relevant to Chinese politics is necessary. The criteria applied in this report — which is not exhaustive or conclusive— is detailed below. However, it is indicative of the relationships and dynamics that influence decisions about the appointment of key personnel. Since there are only vague written rules in the Party Congress about personnel appointments, decisions could be made based on historical precedent and recently established practices.

## 1. Age/Seniority

Age limits and seniority are perhaps the most institutionalised customs governing appointments, compared to other criteria. However, one senior official from the CPC General Office once described age-limits as ‘party practices that can be sometimes adjusted as needed’ (China Digital Times). Yet, given that age limit conventions are applied relatively more strictly than others, particularly to personnel other than Party General Secretary, they are relatively more reliable indicators of personnel retirements. For PSC and Politburo seats, the retirement convention of “seven up, eight down” (七上八下) suggests that officials older than 68 at the time of the Party Congress are not likely be appointed to the PSC or PB.

Although the Party has indicated that age will not be the only consideration for the appointment of officials, the last Party Congress is an indication of how stringently this custom could be applied. For instance, Wang Qishan, Xi Jinping’s close ally until recently, was expected to receive an extension on the PSC in 2017 even though he was older than 68 at the time. Surprisingly, Wang was moved out of the PSC and made Vice-President of the PRC (Mitchell). The custom of age limits is likely to be applied to most members, including Xi’s allies. For the Central Committee members, the age limit is 65.

## 2. Factional Affiliation/Relationship with Xi Jinping

An increasingly visible trend concerning the appointments of personnel to the Party’s highest ruling bodies is the role of factional affiliations or connections to Xi Jinping. Studies have shown that factional affiliation has played a larger role in political advancement of Party officials compared to others (Shih et al). Factional loyalties strongly influence prospects of promotion under Xi Jinping as the collective leadership model gives way to a core leadership model. The PSC and Politburo typically reflect a fairly even balance of power between the

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factions in the Party. However, this balance is less evident as Xi Jinping's faction —a mix of the New Zhijiang Army, Shanghai clique, Shaanxi clique and Tsinghua clique — gains prominence.

Since becoming General Secretary, Xi Jinping has elevated personnel with whom he shares professional, educational or personal relationships to the Politburo and PSC. Around 60% of the 19th Politburo has connections to Xi Jinping, which were developed during Xi's formative years in China's provincial government (Thomas). Some of Xi's allies were also directly promoted into the Politburo from outside the Central Committee or from the Alternate Central Committee.

Connections to Xi Jinping take the form of classmates/peers during his education at Tsinghua University, colleagues during Xi's time in provincial administrations in Zhejiang, Fujian and Shaanxi and other personal relationships developed during the course of Xi's rise within the Party. Xi Jinping's role in selecting candidates to the Politburo is further enhanced by the 2017 ban on straw polls among Central Committee members for Politburo candidates, that were replaced by face-to-face consultations with Xi Jinping ("Xi Discarded Straw Polls"). Given that networks/factions play an important role in political advancement and Xi's faction has gradually expanded across China's highest Party organs, relationships with Xi Jinping are expected to play an outsized role in the determination of promotions at this Party Congress.

### **3. Leadership Experience**

Experience in administration and management at the provincial and ministerial level is an important requirement for appointment to higher offices of the Party. Candidates with years of experience in managing important regions like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Xinjiang are well positioned to join the Politburo and PSC. Similarly, administrative experience in multiple regions of China and in various sectors is a marker of seniority, eligibility and reliability of a candidate. This requirement is also important because it is easier to justify promotions within the Party if a candidate is well qualified and relatively harder to push through if a candidate is widely considered to be less competent than others.

Leadership capabilities are critical especially when Xi's China is facing challenges in the form of zero-COVID implementation, natural disasters and sluggish economic growth. Also, leadership capabilities will allow Xi great flexibility to maintain focus on the CMC related operations, especially as reunification of Taiwan takes centre stage.

### **4. Education/Expertise**

Trends within the Party since the Reform and Opening up have indicated the growing influence of educational qualifications on political advancement/promotions. Educational qualifications have gradually expanded from high-school degrees to graduate-school degrees, exerting a positive effect on the prospects for promotion. Since the 13th Party Congress in 1987, the imp-

Importance of education has grown significantly and by 2002 college degrees were a prerequisite for admission into the top leadership roles (Shih et al). Additionally, as economic growth in China slows and prominent economists like Liu He are set to retire, the need for personnel with expertise in economy and financial management is appreciated.

Studies have found that graduate degree holders outranked high school graduates and dropouts by 25 percentiles at the 16th Party Congress and only 2% of members lacked a college degree (Shih et al). The role of technocrats and experts in certain key sectors has also appreciated in recent Party Congresses. For instance, aerospace and aviation industry experts like Zhang Qingwei, Xu Dazhe, Ma Xingrui and Yuan Jiajun who have previously worked extensively in China's aerospace, aviation and space programs are poised for promotion at the 20th Party Congress. According to Cheng Li, there are 46 'strategic scientists' in the 19th Central Committee with expertise in the aerospace industry (Li). These members also tend to be from the 1970s generation and stand a good chance of being promoted into the Politburo. Moreover, Xi Jinping's calls for technological nationalism and emphasis on innovation and technology appreciate the chances of technocrats joining the Party's highest decision-making bodies.

## **5. Crisis Management**

The prospects of appointment to higher office are also made apparent by the roles that officials play during a crisis. Personnel entrusted with managing a crisis or emerging threat could be considered reliable or important to Xi Jinping. For instance, during the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, the Party replaced the Party Secretary for Hubei, Jiang Chaoliang for improper management of the crisis. He was replaced by Ying Yong, the former mayor of Shanghai, who has close ties to Xi Jinping ("Center Replaces Party Chief"). Chen Yixin was appointed Party Secretary of Wuhan at the time and later directed the anti-corruption campaign targeting China's public security apparatus (Cai). Such appointments could reflect the importance of certain officials for Xi Jinping. Another example is Chen Quanguo, Party Secretary of Tibet and later Xinjiang, who was responsible for establishing the surveillance and security apparatus in both provinces (Wang). Similarly, officials placed in the public security apparatus and anti-corruption commissions like the CCDI and National Supervisory Commission (NSC) are close Xi allies and considered reliable or loyal.

The above criteria are not an exhaustive list for evaluating the suitability of appointment to higher office. The opaque nature of elite politics in China makes it difficult to ascertain the outcome of a process for certain. There could be other factors that influence Xi Jinping and the Party's reasoning for appointment of certain personnel. For instance, certain promotions from the Alternate Central Committee to the Politburo have taken place in the past, like in the case of Xi Jinping, making it difficult to predict certain appointments.



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PART III:  
**THE FUTURE IS HERE**

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# LEAST LIKELY OUTCOMES

## 1. Expansion/Contraction of the PSC

The size of the PSC is an indication of Xi Jinping's power within the Party, hinting at the degree of centralisation. The highest decision-making body has ranged from 5 to 9 members and is currently composed of 7 members. There is the possibility that the PSC expands or contracts.

A larger PSC of nine members is relatively more prone to fractures and reflects a weaker leadership constrained by multiple competing interests and factions. However, some scholars argue that it would allow Xi to incorporate more loyalists into the PSC (Deepak).

The PSC was expanded from 7 to 9 members in 2002 by Jiang Zemin, apparently to stack the body with his allies and exercise influence over Hu Jintao's authority and ability to make policy (Mai and Gan). On the other hand, a smaller PSC of 5 members reveals a greater centralisation of authority, unhindered by competing factions or dissenting voices.

If the PSC contracts at the 20th NPC, it is a clear signal that Xi Jinping has been successful in consolidating power and will face fewer checks on his power and ability to make policy until 2027. However, it is most likely that the PSC retains its current composition of 7 members.

## 2. Change in Xi Jinping's Titles

Speculation and rumours surrounding Xi Jinping's future as General Secretary suggest that Xi could restore the title of Chairman of the Communist Party Central Committee, the highest authority in the party, state and military. The title was held by Mao Zedong for three decades from 1945 to 1976 and passed on to Hua Guofeng and Hu Yaobang, until it was abolished by Deng Xiaoping in 1982 (Hadano).

Reviving the position of Chairman, which has no fixed term limits, would require amending the Party Constitution and reignite concerns about the cult of personality that characterised Mao Zedong's rule (Cunningham). This move seems unlikely given that Xi Jinping can continue to wield power without altering the status quo and without risking controversy that would arise with the revival of the Chairman position.

Another possibility, based on speculation and rumour, is that Xi holds on to the CMC chairmanship position and installs an ally as General Secretary, although this is highly unlikely given the absence of a candidate suitable for the position of General Secretary. Some voices in Chinese social media and academia predict that Li Keqiang might become

the General Secretary while Xi remains President and CMC Chair (Deepak) (Chu). Although this seems unlikely given Xi Jinping's power in the Party, Li Keqiang's appointment as General Secretary and Xi's recession from power would reveal opposition to Xi's personalistic style of rule from within the Party.

### **3. Appointment of a Successor**

Most analysts are silent on the possibility of a successor to Xi Jinping. Following past practice, Xi should have designated a successor in 2017 who would be groomed for the top position over the next 5 years. It is unlikely that Xi Jinping appoints a successor to the PSC in 2022, though it is a remote possibility. Any appointments to the PSC in 2022 could be considered potential successors depending on their leadership credentials and age. If the newly appointed members to the PSC are limited in their leadership qualifications, they are unlikely to be considered successors to Xi Jinping.

The potential successor would also have to be around 10 years younger than the age limit of 68, young enough to serve one term on the PSC and two terms as General Secretary. Declaring a successor would make Xi Jinping less influential and threaten his position in the Party, which is why he is unlikely to declare one at the 20th Party Congress. Also, it would expose the successor apparent to intense scrutiny and political manoeuvring over the coming years.

### **4. Li Keqiang Moved out of PSC**

A telling sign of Xi Jinping's power within the Party is if Li Keqiang is forced into retirement at the 20th

Party Congress. Li Keqiang is young enough to serve another term on the PSC even though he will retire in March 2023. It is likely that Xi Jinping replaces Li Keqiang on the PSC with an ally, taking the number of vacancies in the PSC from two to three. Moreover, if Xi Jinping appoints Hu Chunhua to the PSC, it could come at the cost of Li Keqiang's place as Xi would like to have either Li or Hu on the PSC knowing that Hu Chunhua is a Hu Jintao protégé, just like Li Keqiang.

### **5. Wang Yi Moved into Politburo**

Yang Jiechi is set to leave the Politburo and his replacement could be Wang Yi, who is 68 and expected to retire from the Central Committee. However, it is possible that Wang Yi is promoted to the Politburo if Xi Jinping decides to make an exception to the retirement age norm. Such a move could be driven by the challenges facing China on the foreign policy front: war in Europe and tensions over Taiwan. Wang Yi's experience and contacts could be considered invaluable at a time when cross-strait relations become prominent.

### **6. Factional Balance**

The consolidation of Xi Jinping's power within the Party since his appointment in 2013 has resulted in a shift from the collective leadership model to the core leader model. As core leader, Xi has diminished the power of rivals and factions within the Party by appointing his allies and clients to the PSC and Politburo. The current PSC is slightly balanced in Xi's favour and nearly 60% of members in the current Politburo have direct ties to Xi (Thomas). Xi is

likely to install more allies to the Politburo and even bring in allies from outside the Alternate Central Committee or even from outside the Central Committee, like he did at the 19th Party Congress with Cai Qi and Yang Xiaodu (Thomas). Given the presence of several Xi allies in the Politburo and their inevitable appointment to the PSC, it is likely to firmly establish the core leadership model.

### **7. Inclusion of Women and Ethnic Minorities**

No woman has ever served on the PSC and the current Politburo has only one female candidate, Sun Chunlan, who is past the retirement age and expected to retire at this party congress (Zheng and Rui). There is only one female candidate that appears eligible to join the Politburo, Chen Yiqin, Party Secretary of Guizhou.

There are nine female Full members of the Central Committee and according to Cheng Li, all of them are past the retirement age or have been moved into ceremonial roles already (Li). The prospects for women and ethnic minorities are not promising at this Party Congress. However, it is likely that at least one female candidate is appointed to the Politburo.

### **8. Retention of Senior Leaders**

The retention of senior leaders appears unlikely at this Party Congress. . At the previous Party Congress in 2017, it was expected that Xi's close ally, Wang Qishan, would be given another term on PSC in spite of being older than 68 at the time. How-

-ever, Wang Qishan was moved out of the PSC and made Vice-President of the PRC, without violating the custom of age-limits. Although the Party has indicated that age will not be the only consideration for the appointment of officials at the 20th Party Congress, it is not likely that any exceptions would be made apart from Xi Jinping. Members of the PSC like Li Zhanshu and Han Zheng, who are older than 68 are not likely to receive an extension. Similarly, Xi's closest allies on the Politburo, like Liu He, are also likely to be retired at the 20th Party Congress.

# PREDICTING PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS

The following section is an assessment of the candidates eligible for retirement and promotion in the PSC and Politburo. There are multiple possibilities for each available spot on the PSC and Politburo and the subsequent section will detail the justification for the promotion of potential candidates on the basis of the methodology outlined above.

## POLITBURO STANDING COMMITTEE

### **PSC Retirements:**

There are 2 candidates, based on age, scheduled and highly likely to retire in October at the Party Congress: Li Zhanshu (71) and Han Zheng (68). Also, as assessed above, there remains a remote possibility that Li Keqiang is replaced on the PSC.

Li Zhanshu and Han Zheng are both expected to move out of the PSC due to their age, opening up two seats in the PSC. Li Zhanshu is the Chairman of China's top legislative body, the National People's Congress, and will likely compete with Liu He for the post of Vice-President of PRC. Han Zheng is the first ranked Vice Premier and heads the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macau Affairs. He is likely to retire due to his age. Both PSC members are close associates of Xi Jinping and in charge of important positions in the Party. Han Zheng, for example, backed Xi Jinping to succeed Chen Liangyu as Party chief of Shanghai in 2006 when Han was mayor (Kahn). Similarly, Li Zhanshu was director of the General Office of the Central Committee, playing an important role in the anti-corruption campaign (Yang).

### **Promotions to PSC:**

There are four candidates that seem likely to receive promotions into the Politburo Standing Committee:

1. Hu Chunhua
2. Ding Xuexiang
3. Li Qiang
4. Chen Min'er



## POLITBURO STANDING COMMITTEE AGE BASED CHANGES & PREDICTIONS



### Main candidates under consideration for PSC promotion

#### 1. Hu Chunhua:

Hu Chunhua is third ranked vice-premier and is one of two eligible candidates (other candidate is Wang Yang) to succeed Li Keqiang as Premier, having served one term as Vice-Premier. Popularly known as “Little Hu”, indicating his proximity to Hu Jintao, Hu Chunhua is from the CYL faction and has worked with Hu Jintao when Hu Jintao was Party Secretary of Tibet (Thomas). However, Hu Chunhua has recently signalled his political loyalty to Xi Jinping, indicating his ambitions for higher office. In an op-ed on agriculture and rural issues, Hu mentions Xi’s name 50 times, a signal of his political loyalty to the Party core (“All Eyes on Hu Chunhua”).

He is a promising candidate due to his administrative and leadership record, given his experience as Party Secretary of Guangdong and Inner Mongolia and his role in the CPC Leading Small Group for Rural Work. As Vice-Premier and one of Li Keqiang’s four deputies, he is in charge of the Agriculture, Water, Culture and Tourism portfolios. Crucially, Hu is in charge of poverty alleviation efforts, one of ‘three critical battles’ that Xi Jinping has outlined. More recently, Hu Chunhua has spoken on issues related to the economy, finance, free trade and foreign investment, perhaps an indication that he is being prepared for the office of Premier.

As Li Keqiang’s deputy since 2017, Hu is considered Li Keqiang’s first choice for PSC promotion and Premier. It is also likely that Hu Chunhua’s promotion has Xi Jinping’s approval given the extensive exposure given to Hu Chunhua by state media (Chan). Xi’s decision to appoint Hu Chunhua would be welcomed by

the Party given Hu's qualifications and it would retain the semblance of factional balance given that Hu is from a competing faction. Moreover, the gradual weakening of the position of Premier would ensure that Hu Chunhua does not pose a significant threat to Xi after being elevated to higher office.

**Expected Outcome:** Appointed to PSC to replace Han Zheng and becomes Premier when Li Keqiang retires in March 2023.

**Alternate Outcome (Less likely):** Li Keqiang is moved out of PSC and is replaced by Hu Chunhua, who takes over as Premier in March 2023.

## 2. Ding Xuexiang:

Ding Xuexiang is the Director of the CPC General Office and the Director of the PRC Office of the President, earning him the title of gatekeeper (danei zongguan). He is also part of important committees like the CPC National Security Commission and Secretary of the CPC Central Party and State Organs Working Committee (Thomas and Damien). Ding turns 60 in September and is young enough to serve 2 terms on the PSC. He has previously worked closely with Xi Jinping as his chief secretary when Xi Jinping was Party Secretary of Shanghai. And, as Director of the CPC General Office and Office of the PRC President, Ding is likely to have a great understanding of the inner workings of the Party and State (Thomas).

He also accompanies Xi Jinping to almost all political and international engagements. Ding is one of the four candidates that was promoted from the Alternate Central Committee to the Politburo, an indication of his political prospects. Ding's political loyalty is unlikely to be in question, given his past connection to Xi and his working relationship with Xi Jinping for nearly 10 years. Ding holds a degree in mechanical engineering and has worked extensively in the materials field. One factor limiting his chances of promotion is his lack of provincial administrative experience. However, leaders like Wang Huning and Wen Jiabao were appointed to the PSC without having any provincial administrative credentials (Thomas). Ding Xuexiang is also young enough to be considered a successor to Xi Jinping after one term on the PSC.

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to PSC as a straight swap for Li Zhanshu and is made NPCSC chairman.

**Alternate Outcome (Less likely):** Wang Huning is retired and Ding Xuexiang replaces him as manager of day-to-day functions of Politburo and PSC.

### Other candidates under consideration for PSC promotion

## 3. Li Qiang:

Li Qiang is Party Secretary of Shanghai who is 63 and can serve one term on the PSC. Prospects for Li Qiang's promotion to the PSC are mainly driven by

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by historical precedent: every Party Secretary of Shanghai since 1987 has won promotion to the PSC (Thomas). And, Li Qiang's close relationship with Xi could explain why he was parachuted into the Politburo from the Alternate Committee like in the case of Ding Xuexiang. Li was Xi Jinping's chief secretary and member of the provincial standing committee when Xi was Party Secretary of Zhejiang from 2002 to 2007. Li Qiang is a trusted ally of Xi Jinping and was transferred to Jiangsu and made Party Secretary to crack down on the corruption in the province (. And, Li Qiang and Xi Jinping share a common outlook on the role of the private sector in China's economy and the anti-corruption campaign (Gan). However, Li Qiang's prospects may have diminished after the management of the COVID-19 outbreak in Shanghai. Nonetheless, he was reappointed as Party Secretary of the city in 2022.

#### **4. Chen Min'er:**

Chen Min'er is Party Secretary of Chongqing and was slated to be Xi Jinping's successor at one point. Chen turns 62 in September and is eligible to serve 2 terms on the PSC. Chen is considered one of Xi's closest allies, having worked as Xi Jinping's speechwriter and provincial propaganda chief when Xi was Party Secretary of Zhejiang (Thomas). Chen was previously Guizhou Party Secretary and worked in the province to tackle poverty, overseeing poverty alleviation schemes that have won the appreciation of Xi Jinping. Chen has a strong credentials as a provincial administrator and has worked with key Xi allies in Zhejiang and Guizhou. As Party Secretary of Chongqing, historical precedent does not favour Chen: both previous Party Secretaries of Chongqing, Bo Xilai and Sun Zhengcai, were purged and jailed (Thomas). Although appointments to the PSC might already be decided, Chen's management of the COVID-19 crisis, wildfires and electricity shortage in the key region might influence his prospects at the Party Congress.



# POLITBURO

## Retirements from Politburo:

Based on age limits, there are 9 candidates out of 18 that are likely to retire at the 20th Party Congress (Reddy). These personnel are posted in key positions like the head of the Organisation Department, CPC Political and Legal Affairs Commission, Vice Chair of the CMC, CPC Central Foreign Affairs Commission and two Vice-Premiers. Appointments to the Politburo will zealously implement ideology and policy as decided by Xi Jinping.

The following Politburo members are likely to be retired because they are older than 68 or will turn 68 by October and are not eligible for promotion to the PSC:

1. Zhang Youxia
2. Yang Jiechi
3. Xu Qiliang
4. Sun Chunlan
5. Wang Chen
6. Liu He
7. Yang Xiaodu
8. Chen Xi
9. Guo Shengkun

## Promotions to Politburo:

The following candidates from the Central Committee are expected to receive promotions to the Politburo at the 20th Party Congress.

- **He Lifeng**

He Lifeng is the director of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the Vice-chair of the CPPCC. He is 67 and eligible for promotion to the Politburo. He Lifeng worked as Deputy Director of the Finance Bureau under Xi Jinping between 1984-1988, when Xi was the Vice mayor of Xiamen city. Additionally, he has worked closely with Xi's ally, Liu He in the NDRC since 2017.

He Lifeng also regularly accompanies Xi Jinping on inspection tours and is a strong candidate for the Vice-Premier position. His background in public finance will be of some significance given the instability of the Chinese economy. He Lifeng was appointed as CPPCC Vice-chairman in 2018, elevating his rank from ministerial level to deputy national leader to avoid retirement.

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to Politburo and made Vice-Premier replacing Liu He.

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## CONTENDERS FOR POLITBURO POSITIONS



WANG XIAOHONG (65)



CHENG YIXIN (62)



SHEN YUEYUE (65)



MA XINGRUI (62)



ZHANG SHENGMIN (64)



HE LIFENG (67)



YUAN JIAJUN (59)



LE YUCHANG (59)



LIU JIEYI (64)



MIAO HUA (66)



MENG XIANGFENG (57)



YING YONG (64)



HU HEPING (59)



LI SHANGFU (64)

### • Wang Xiaohong

Wang Xiaohong is Party Secretary and Minister of Public Security and Deputy Secretary of CPC Political and Legal Affairs Commission. He is 65 and eligible for promotion to the Politburo. Wang has worked with Xi Jinping in Fujian as Deputy director of the Public Security Department when Xi was Governor and Deputy Party secretary (Li and Liu). Some speculate that he was in charge of Xi Jinping's personal security at the time and was made Beijing's chief of police in 2015. Wang is the first police official to head the ministry in 24 years (Lau). Wang is one of the only high-ranking officials within the public security apparatus to survive the anti-corruption campaign and is expected to execute Xi's anti-corruption drive and national security agenda.

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to Politburo replacing Guo Shengkun as head of CPC Political and Legal Affairs Commission.

### • Chen Yixin

Chen Yixin is Secretary-General of the CPC Political and Legal Affairs Commission, Director of the CPC Cross-Military Region Reform Group and Deputy Office Director of the CPC Central Comprehensive Law-based Governance Commission, eligible for promotion to the Politburo (Thomas and Damien). Chen turns 63 in September 2022 and is in contention for a Politburo spot along with Wang Xiaohong. Compared to Wang Xiaohong, Chen is an alternate member of the CC as opposed to Wang who is a Full member.

Chen worked with Xi in Zhejiang as Deputy Director of the General Office of the provincial government from 2000-2003. Chen was sent to Hubei at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to lead pandemic control efforts and in July 2020 directed an anti-corruption effort targeting public security officials (Cai).

**Expected Outcome:** Competes with Wang Xiaohong for a Politburo seat to replace Guo Shengkun as head of CPC Political and Legal Affairs Commission. If not a Politburo seat, he will at least become a Full CC member.

- **Ma Xingrui**

Ma Xingrui is the Party Secretary of Xinjiang and a technocrat with 35 years of experience in China's aerospace sector. Ma has previously worked as Deputy Party Secretary in Guangdong and Party Secretary of Shenzhen, demonstrating provincial administrative experience, and was the chair of the organizing committee of the Asian Youth Games in 2021. He is a 'strategic scientist', having worked extensively in China's Lunar Exploration projects and is part of a handful of technocrats that are likely to receive promotions in October 2022 (Li). Ma is already a Full member of the CC with provincial administrative experience and a technocrat with expertise in strategic industries outlined by Xi as priority areas. He took over Chen Quanguo's position as Party Secretary of Xinjiang and is expected to lead the economic revitalisation of the province (Lau).

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to Politburo given his position as Party Secretary of Xinjiang and his professional background.

- **Shen Yueyue**

Shen Yueyue is the Vice-Chair of the NPC Standing Committee and Chair of the All-China Women's Federation, expected to replace Sun Chunlan as the only female member of the Politburo. Shen Yueyue is 65 and is in competition with Shen Yiqin for the Politburo post. Shen Yueyue is considered to be close to Xi Jinping and accompanied him in July 2022 to Hong Kong to mark the 25th anniversary of the former colony's return to the mainland (Zheng). She has also worked under Chen Xi in the Organisation Department and in the Ministry of Personnel (Thomas and Damien). Compared to Shen Yiqin who has only worked in Guizhou and is a provincial ministerial leader, Shen Yueyue is a deputy national leader and has worked in various provinces like Zhejiang and Anhui.

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to Politburo replacing Sun Chunlan. Competes with Shen Yiqin for the position.

- **Meng Xiangfeng**

Meng Xiangfeng is the first ranked Executive Deputy Director of the CPC General Office, working under Ding Xuexiang. He is expected to take over the position from Ding Xuexiang when Ding is promoted to the PSC. Meng is 59, part of a new generation of leaders likely to be promoted into the Politburo. He has worked with Xi allies like Cai Qi in Hangzhou and Chen Xi in Liaoning. He

was director of the National Administration of State Secrets Promotion from 2013 to 2015 and worked in the CCDI from 1986 to 2007 (Thomas and Damien). The Director of the CPC General Office has been a Politburo position since 1997 and every director of the CPC General Office since 1986 has previously been Deputy Director except in the case of Li Zhanshu in 2012.

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to Politburo replacing Ding Xuexiang as Director of CPC General Office.

- **Yuan Jiajun**

Yuan Jiajun is the Party Secretary of Zhejiang province and an aerospace engineer by training. Yuan is a technocrat with expertise in the aerospace sector and in provincial administration as well. Yuan was the former president of the Chinese Academy of Space Technology and Vice chair of the China Association for Science and Technology from 2006 to 2016.

Like Ma Xingrui, Yuan Jiajun has served in multiple provinces like Zhejiang and Ningxia as Vice Governor and Deputy Party Secretary, demonstrating provincial administrative experience (Chen). In a speech delivered on June 23rd at the Zhejiang Provincial Party Congress, Yuan Jiajun praised Xi Jinping extensively and stated, “We must always harbour a heart of gratitude to General Secretary Xi Jinping, a heart of love and respect, and a will to defend [him]”.

**Expected Outcome:** May join Politburo given the importance of Zhejiang province to Xi Jinping and Yuan Jiajun’s professional background.

- **Liu Jieyi**

Liu Jieyi is Director of the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office and Deputy Director of the CPC Central Foreign Affairs Commission, aged 64 and a potential candidate to join the Politburo, replacing Yang Jiechi. Liu Jieyi was previously China’s permanent representative to the UN and has worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for most of his career. He is likely to compete with Le Yucheng and Song Tao for the Politburo position, but Le Yucheng was recently made Deputy Director of the National Radio and Television Administration and Song Tao was made Vice-Chair of CPPCC Education, Science, Health and Sports Committee. He is a Full member, unlike Le Yucheng, and younger than Song Tao. Given the importance of Taiwan for Xi Jinping’s third term, Liu is likely to receive the promotion to the Politburo.

**Expected Outcome:** Competes with Le Yucheng for promotion to Politburo replacing Yang Jiechi. Relatively more likely to win promotion to Politburo.

- **Le Yucheng**

Le Yucheng is Deputy Director of the National Radio and Television Administration, and was Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2018 to 2022. Le Yucheng is 59 and young enough to serve two terms on the Po-

-litburo. He has worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the majority of his career and has experience working on Russia, India and Central Asia.

He is likely to compete with Liu Jieyi for the Politburo promotion. However, he is only an Alternate CC member, vice-minister and may not have the age/seniority to secure the promotion. And, his unexpected transfer to the National Radio and Television Administration could have been a result of China's mishandling of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Ma).

**Expected Outcome:** Competes with Liu Jieyi for promotion to Politburo replacing Yang Jiechi. Less likely to be promoted to Politburo.

- **Ying Yong**

Ying Yong is Vice chair of the NPC Constitution and Law Committee who is 64 and is considered a promising candidate for promotion to the Politburo. Ying Yong was previously Party Secretary of Hubei, replacing Jiang Chaoliang at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, indicating the trust placed in him by Xi Jinping (Zheng).

Reports suggest that Ying Yong has started working with the Supreme People's Procuratorate as Deputy Party Secretary and is expected to replace Zhang Jun as Procurator-general, the country's top prosecutor ("Official Set to Replace Top Prosecutor"). Ying Yong worked in Zhejiang as President of the Zhejiang provincial Higher People's Court when Xi Jinping was Governor and Party Secretary.

**Expected Outcome:** Promoted to Politburo.

- **Hu Heping**

Hu Heping is the Minister of Culture and Tourism and the Deputy Director of the CPC Propaganda Department, a potential replacement for Chen Xi who heads the Organisation Department or even Huang Kunming as head of Propaganda Department. Hu Heping has worked with Xi ally Chen Xi in Tsinghua University from 1980 to 2002 and was in Tsinghua University when Xi Jinping was a doctoral student from 1998 to 2002.

Importantly, Hu Heping was undergoing professional training at the CPC Central Party School when Xi was President of the school between 2007 and 2012 (Thomas and Damien). Hu also has provincial administrative experience as Party Secretary of Shaanxi and is only 59 years old. He was apparently recommended to Xi Jinping by Chen Xi but his recent transfer to Ministry of Culture and Tourism (which can be viewed as a demotion) as well as the Qinling villa case suggests a side-lining of his role in the Party (Radio Free Asia). He is likely to compete with Jiang Xinzhe for the position of Head of Organization Department.

**Expected Outcome:** Replacement for Chen Xi or Huang Kunming, but his diminished prospects cast doubt on his promotion to the Politburo.

- **Miao Hua/Zhang Shengmin**

The vacancies left by retiring CMC vice-chairmen Zhang Youxia and Xu Qiliang could be filled by Miao Hua and Zhang Shengmin. If Miao Hua and Zhang Shengmin become CMC vice-chair, they are likely to be appointed to the Politburo as well. However, neither candidate has a background in operational command or weapons development that is traditionally required of vice-chairman of the CMC. It is also possible that only one of the two candidates are selected for the Politburo spot.

**Expected Outcome:** Miao Hua and Zhang Shengmin are likely to become Vice-chairs of the CMC and occupy two spots on the Politburo.

**Alternate Outcome:** One of the two will become a Vice-chair of the CMC and join the Politburo.

- **Li Shangfu**

Li Shangfu is Director of the CMC Equipment Development Department, holding the rank of General. He was previously the deputy commander of the PLA Strategic Support force and spent over 10 years as Director of the Xichang Satellite Launch Center. Li replaced Zhang Youxia as head of the Equipment Development Department and is a potential candidate for promotion to Politburo.

**Expected Outcome:** Joins the CMC as head of Equipment Development Department and is appointed to the Politburo.

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# PART III: IN CONCLUSION

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# KEY TAKEAWAYS

The outcomes of the 20th Party Congress will reveal the extent of Xi Jinping's authority and control over the Party. It is widely expected that Xi will promote allies and sideline his rivals which is a preference demonstrated by previous top leaders of the Party and consistent with Xi Jinping's first two terms. The PSC and Politburo are almost certain to reflect the near-complete control Xi exercises over the Party and the diminished role of rival factions. The chosen personnel are also less likely to express opposition to Xi and his policies, opting to signal loyalty in the hope of securing their positions within the Party. They will execute policies that manifest Xi's vision of national rejuvenation and further reinforce his core position within the party.

Personnel that share relationships with Xi, personal or professional, are more likely to be considered trustworthy and loyal, which enhances their prospects for promotion at the 20th Party Congress. Moreover, it improves their chances of becoming Xi's trusted aides and consiglieres. This was true in the case of Xi's most trusted allies like Wang Qishan and Liu He, who were instrumental in Xi's first and second terms as a result of their personal relationship with Xi. Xi will complete the installation of loyal personnel in key Party positions like the CCDI, NSC, Organisation Department, Propaganda Department, CPC General Office, CPC Political and Legal Affairs Commission and other major Party organs, consolidating his dominance over all Party organs.

This top-down control will also extend to the State Council and its ministries, which have already been relegated to executors of policy. The approach runs the risk of reducing flexibility in policy making and minimising policy options available to national and local leaders. Given that incentives for conformity and loyalty outweigh those accompanied with experimental approaches to policy problems, the scope for policy innovation is likely to be diminished.

Most importantly, the personnel chosen to execute Xi's vision will have to navigate pressing challenges and emerging threats facing China's economy and society. They will be expected to enforce the zero-COVID policy, sustain the focus on common prosperity, rigorously impose political discipline, develop strategic trade sectors and generate economic growth.

Any failures in the implementation of Xi's policy or shortfalls in outcomes will determine the political fate of leaders within the PSC and Politburo. This is likely to make leaders more prone to cultivating favour with Xi and adopt any means necessary to do so. The performance of these personnel over the next five years will shape perceptions and judgements of Xi and his continued role as Party helmsman — as well as define his enduring legacy.



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