

## The 7 Men Who Will Run China

What you need to know about the members of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee.

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By **Bo Zhiyue**

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New members of the Politburo Standing Committee, from left, Han Zheng, Wang Huning, Li Zhanshu, Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, Zhao Leji stand together at Beijing's Great Hall of the People (Oct. 25, 2017).

Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

At its First Plenum on October 25, 2017, the 19th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) elected members of the Politburo Standing Committee. As widely expected, among the seven members of the 18th Politburo Standing Committee, four (Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, and Zhang Gaoli) retired due to their age; and two (Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang) were re-elected. As for the final member, contrary to the speculation that Wang Qishan might stay on, he also stepped down possibly because of his age.

The following is the new line-up of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee members.

### **No. 1: Xi Jinping**

President Xi Jinping, 64, was re-elected as general secretary of the CCP Central Committee and No. 1 ranking member of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee as well as chairman of the Central Military Committee. The core of the CCP and Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army, Xi has further consolidated his power over the Party at the 19th Party Congress after his thought, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," was enshrined in the CCP Constitution as a "long-term guide to action that the Party must adhere to and develop" along with Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents (Jiang Zemin's contribution), and the Scientific Outlook on Development (Hu Jintao's).

During the Party Congress, Xi was hailed as a "great leader," "helmsman," and the general architect of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era. The CCP under Xi's leadership has pledged to lead China into a new

era of making the country strong again in the next three decades.

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### **No. 2: Li Keqiang**

Premier Li Keqiang, 62, was also re-elected as the No. 2 ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee. A political leader with strong ties to the Chinese Communist Youth League, Li has collaborated with Xi very well in the past five years and has been a strong supporter of Xi's domestic and foreign policy initiatives.

With academic training in both law and economics, Li gained substantial experiences as a provincial leader and a national leader. He is likely to continue as premier of the State Council for another five years.

### **No. 3: Li Zhanshu**

Director of the General Office of the Central Committee of the CCP since September 2012, Li, 67, has earned his seat at the Politburo Standing Committee as Xi's strongest ally. A native of Hebei, Li worked with Xi as the party secretary of a neighboring county in his home province in the 1980s. Li also worked in Shaanxi Province, Xi's home province, from 1998 to 2003 in various capacities.

Li worked as governor of Heilongjiang from 2008 to 2010 and as party secretary of Guizhou from 2010 to 2012. Due to the downfall of Ling Jihua, director of the General Office of the Central Committee of the CCP under Hu Jintao, Li was transferred to Beijing as the executive deputy director of the General Office in August 2012.

Li has been working with Xi very closely and has accompanied Xi in all of his domestic inspection tours and foreign visits. He has also visited foreign countries on behalf of Xi.

Li is likely to take over the portfolio of Zhang Dejiang as chairman of the next National People's Congress Standing Committee in March 2018.

#### **No. 4: Wang Yang**

Vice Premier of the State Council since March 2013 and a Politburo member since October 2007, Wang, 62, has finally been elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee. A native of Anhui Province, Wang has been a major contender for a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee since 2012.

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With a humble family background, Wang has been rising in Chinese politics mostly because of his capabilities. As mayor of Tongling in Anhui at the age of 33 in 1988, Wang earned his reputation as a reformer with bold reform initiatives in various sectors.

He has accumulated extensive administrative experiences as both a provincial leader and a national leader. He was vice governor of Anhui, party secretary of Chongqing, and party secretary of Guangdong. He also served as deputy secretary general of the State Council and has been vice premier of the State Council.

He is likely to take over the portfolio of Yu Zhengsheng as chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in March 2018.

#### **No. 5: Wang Huning**

Director of the Central Policy Research Office since October 2002 and a Politburo member since November 2012, Wang Huning, 62, has also been made a member of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee.

An academic-cum-politician, Wang has been a major contributor to the ideological development of the CCP since the 1980s. The author of “new authoritarianism,” which espoused political centralism for developing countries such as China, Wang has assisted three general secretaries — Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping — in their ideological innovations. He has also accompanied President Jiang Zemin, President Hu Jintao, and President Xi Jinping in their foreign visits since the late 1990s.

He is likely to take over the portfolio of Liu Yunshan as president of the Central Party School and as the Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CCP, especially propaganda and personnel issues. Due to the departure of Li Yuanchao, Wang is one of contenders for the position of vice president of the People’s Republic of China when state positions are reshuffled in March 2018.

#### **No. 6: Zhao Leji**

Director of the Central Organization Department since 2012, Zhao, 60, was elected as a new member of the Politburo Standing Committee. Although his parents were from Xi’an, Shaanxi Province, Zhao was actually born and grew up Qinghai Province. He joined the CCP in 1975 at the age of 18 and was enrolled in the Department of Philosophy at Peking University in 1977 as a worker-peasant-soldier student.

Zhao climbed the ladder of success very quickly and became the youngest governor in China in 1999 when he was appointed governor of Qinghai at the age of 42. He was also the youngest provincial party in 2003 when he became party secretary of Qinghai at the age of 46.

A politician with no clear factional orientations, Zhao has faithfully worked with Xi and his classmate, Chen Xi, the executive deputy director of the Central Organization Department, to place Xi's supporters in various strategic positions in the past five years.

Zhao takes over the portfolio of Wang Qishan as head the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission. He is also likely to serve as the head of a new national supervisory commission that is expected to be established in March 2018.

#### **No. 7: Han Zheng**

Party secretary of Shanghai since 2012, Han, 63, has been elevated to be a member of the 19th Politburo Standing Committee. He is the seventh party secretary of Shanghai since 1989 to have entered the Politburo Standing Committee, after Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, Wu Bangguo, Huang Ju, Xi Jinping, and Yu Zhengsheng.

With Cixi, Zhejiang Province as his ancestral home, Han was actually born and grew up in Shanghai. Without formal academic training, Han went through ranks in Shanghai initially through the Chinese Communist Youth League system. He worked directly under Wu Bangguo, Huang Ju, Xu Kuangdi, and Chen Liangyu. He is the only person in the history of Shanghai since 1949 who has served as mayor of Shanghai for 10 years. In his capacity as mayor, he collaborated with Party Bosses Chen Liangyu, Xi Jinping, and Yu Zhengsheng.

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Due to his extensive administrative experiences in Shanghai, Han is likely to be appointed as executive vice premier of the State Council in March 2018.

If the CCP follows the “rule of 68” (those aged 68 or over must step down, those aged 67 or younger may stay on) at the 20th Party Congress in 2022, Xi Jinping, Li Zhanshu, and Han Zheng will have to retire but Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, Zhao Leji, and Wang Huning could stay for another five-year term. However, as general secretary, Xi could very well be exempt from this rule. Notably, none of the newly appointed Politburo Standing Committee members are young enough to make them likely successors to Xi at the 20th Party Congress.

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