

Panel: Is China Prepared for International Leadership? (Orchid)

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The Chinese leadership transition of 2012-2013 is complicated by two facts: first, it is a moving target, and one that so far this year has not been following a predictable or constant trajectory, and second, it is almost entirely unprecedented in scope and nature. It will be the first leadership overhaul that was not pre-determined by the Long March generation, and in a sense, will be the first test of whether the Communist Party as an institution—as opposed to its founding fathers—can engineer a successful and peaceful transition from one generation to another.

Signs are that it is not a very well thought out succession plan. Despite knowing for a decade that this turnover would take place, advance preparations—including promoting candidates to top leadership to serve apprenticeships for taking over power—were minimal.

Whatever compromise is reached about the composition of the post-18th Party Congress leadership, intra-party tensions will remain—and possibly increase—seriously testing the mettle of Xi Jinping and his top colleagues. Several years of uncertainty seem likely as leaders wrestles with what direction to take. The new Chinese leadership, for at least the next several years, will not be in a position either to challenge the US as a global leader nor to take an active leading role on regional, or especially global, issues. It will remain internationally reactive and conservative as it seeks to protect its gains of the past several decades, work out power relations within the new leadership group, and address China's manifold problems. The unresolved intra-leadership disagreements may also make for a period of mixed signals, stumbles, and lurches that could challenge the rest of the region and the US in dealing with China.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.
