

CHINESE LEADERSHIP IN TIBET

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Chinese leaders in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa

Little is reliably known about which individuals and institutions in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are ultimately responsible for formulating and implementing government policy in Tibet. Instead, China's complex and factionalized power structures are almost entirely opaque on the question of Tibet, and the relevant government and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials remain entirely unaccountable to the Tibetan people themselves.

Tibet continues to be controlled - both regionally as well as in relevant Party and government offices in Beijing - by a hard-line conservative faction, made up of people whom several observers have noted over the years have based their careers almost entirely on being "anti-Dalai" and "anti-splittist," and who

therefore have a vested interest in averting any kind of conciliation between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama. While such "anti-Dalai" postures may have been key to advancing their own careers, the frequently vicious personal condemnations of the Dalai Lama have profoundly alienated the vast majority of Tibetans from the Chinese establishment in Tibet - long before any considerations of Tibetans' growing social and economic marginalization are taken into account.

THE CENTRAL STATE LEADERSHIP, XI JINPING

Xi Jinping, as the President and, more importantly, as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, currently has the ultimate say on matters concerning Tibet. His father, Xi Zhongxun, had close connections to Tibet and this makes President Xi someone



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who has a direct family connection with Tibet.

It was initially hoped that Xi Jinping would be a more liberal President, and that he would take a more realistic view of the Tibetan issue. However, he only offered mild reforms on matters such as re-education through labor, criminal law, corruption and the one-child policy. Contrary to civil society's expectations, in Tibet the human rights situation has drastically deteriorated and the crackdown has deepened since Xi assumed power. For instance, in the months immediately after Xi became President, China stepped up its response to Tibetans' calls for freedom, heightening its already strong military presence and introducing further pervasive security systems. New legal measures to criminalize the friends and relatives of those self-immolating were also introduced in 2012, just after Xi was elevated to the top of the Chinese Communist Party.

At the central level, there appears to be a Communist Party's group on Tibet that is chaired by Yu Zhengsheng, a member of the Politburo and chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. This group is believed to be making all policy formulations on Tibet-related issues.

TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION (TAR) PARTY SECRETARY, CHEN QUANGUO

Chen Quanguo was appointed secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region in August 2011. An ethnic Han, Chen is from Henan Province. He joined the Communist Party in February 1976.

As in the case of his predecessor, Chen's tenure has been characterized by increasingly hard-line policies on the Tibetan people, particularly in practice and institutions of Tibetan Buddhism. Despite some changes in the tone, hostile rhetoric against the Dalai

Lama continues.

In an article in the Party journal Qiushi ("Seeking Truth") in 2013, Chen outlined his view of the situation in Tibet and calling for a strengthened ideological strategy to combat "the hostile forces have colluded with the clique of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, and have considered Tibet as a key area for infiltration and separatist activities and as the main battlefield for sabotaging and causing disturbances."

In another article in the same magazine in 2015, Chen said Buddhist temples and monasteries in Tibet must become propaganda centers for the ruling Communist Party.

LOCAL LEVEL LEADERSHIP: GOVERNOR OF THE TAR, LOBSANG GYALTSEN

In January 2013, Lobsang Gyaltsen became the Governor of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

He is a Tibetan from Daggyab in eastern Tibet, born in 1957, and started his career as a teacher and later through the Communist Youth League of China (CYLC). He is a deputy secretary of the TAR Party Committee and had served as an executive vice chairman of the TAR government, director of the TAR United Front Work department, and mayor of Lhasa city.

Lobsang Gyaltsen has not taken any steps that can suggest a hope for real change in Tibet.

Interestingly, the top three positions in the Tibet Autonomous Region after the post of the Party Secretary (which has never been held by a Tibetan), are all currently held by Tibetans who were born in the Chamdo region. They are Pema Thinley, the Chairman of the TAR People's Congress; Phakpalha Gelek Namgyal (Ch: Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai), the Chairman of the TAR People's Political Consultative Conference; and Lobsang Gyaltsen (Ch: Losang



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Jamcan) the Governor of the TAR. At the national level, Jampa Phuntsok (Ch: Qiangba Puncog), also from Chamdo, is a Vice Chairman of the National People's Congress.

THE UNITED FRONT WORK DEPARTMENT

The Central United Front Work Department (UFWD) is the designated organ to oversee the implementation of Tibet policies.

The UFWD is an organization within the Central Committee of the CCP that is tasked to reach out to “non-Party” groups and individuals, both foreign and domestic. The heads of the UFWD have been leading the Chinese Government’s delegation in their talks with envoys of the Dalai Lama. However, given the involvement of United Front personalities in implementation and encouragement of divisive and anti-Dalai Lama activities within the Tibetan society and outside, they are not looked upon kindly by the Tibetan people.

As of December 2015, the director of the UFWD is Sun Chunlan.

She served as the party chief in Dalian from 2001 to 2005, before being transferred to work in Beijing. She has been an alternate member of the 15th and 16th Central Committees of the CCP, and a full member of the 17th Central Committee. In December 2009, Sun Chunlan was named party boss of Fujian Province, the first female to take such a high-level secretaryship since Wan Shaofen, Party Secretary of Jiangxi in the 1980s. She was elected to the 18th Politburo of the CCP in November 2012. After the 18th Party Congress, Sun became the party chief of Tianjin municipality, joined the elite ranks of the CCP Politburo as one of the two women on the body.

CENTRAL TIBET WORK COORDINATION WORKING GROUP

The CCP’s main body for coordinating policies on Tibet is known variously as the “Central Tibet Work Coordination Working Group” or the “Central Coordination Group on the Struggle Against the Dalai Clique.” Very little about the group or its workings is publicly known, and its existence is only occasionally and obliquely referenced to in China’s official press. The seniority of the group’s members - none of whom are Tibetan - and the broad spectrum of interests represented by their respective offices, suggests that the group acts more as a conduit through which existing policies are reviewed and refined prior to their implementation in Tibet, rather than as a body for actually initiating and formulating policies.

TIBET WORK FORUM

The Sixth Tibet Work Forum, held on August 24-25, 2015, was the most recent in a series of rare strategy meetings on Tibet that have now been held just six times since the Chinese took over Tibet in 1949-50. Attended by the entire Politburo, the Party leadership, the emphasis of the Work Forum was on ‘stability’, a political term associated with a dramatic expansion of military and police powers. According to the Chinese state media, the meeting also emphasized the struggle against ‘separatism’, above economic development, in contrast to the last Tibet Work Forum in January 2010. Past Tibet Work Forums have crystallized the Party line on Tibet, most significantly with the Third Tibet Work Forum in 1994, which set forth an aggressive strategy of integration, fast-track economic development, and increased political repression following the large-scale demonstrations of the late 1980’s.