

CHINA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY TEAM

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Executive Summary

1. China revealed its new foreign policy team on 16 March 2013. Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪), former foreign minister, has been elevated to state councilor in charge of foreign affairs. Wang Yi (王毅), director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, took his place as foreign minister.
2. Cui Tiankai (崔天凯), vice foreign minister in charge of North American affairs, is the new ambassador to the United States. The ambassador to Japan remains unchanged for now.
3. The reshuffle of China's most senior diplomats suggests that President Xi Jinping is emphasising the management of the rocky relations with America and Japan, especially in relation to the affairs of the Asia-Pacific region. China may be tougher in its foreign policy but may also be more diplomatic.
4. The new team, however, is only the 'front office team'. The highest foreign policy coordination body is the CCP's Central Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (中央外事工作领导小组 or CFALSG) headed by the top leader and packed with senior ministers.
5. The Central Military Commission comes next in the order. The International Department of CCP is one rung higher than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Several agencies in the State Council of the same rank as the MFA or higher are also involved in foreign affairs.
6. Xi Jinping will provide overall leadership in foreign policy and has a critical role to play in bridging the civilian and the military sides of the state. By all early indications Xi will be more involved and hands-on in foreign policy. His incessant talks about the "China Dream" may fan up nationalism, and he may allow the PLA a bigger say in foreign policy than Hu Jintao.

7. Li Yuanchao, vice president of China and deputy director of the CFALSG, may play a major role in Chinese foreign policy. Li has been assigned no other major portfolio than the oversight of Hong Kong and Macao affairs. He can in theory devote most of his time on China's external relations and become a powerful coordinator of China's diverse foreign policy communities.
8. Overall the new foreign policy team is a better team. It has stronger top leadership and the new front desk team consists of experienced professional diplomats from the MFA who are better trained, more experienced, and have global perspectives. Better coordination and team synergy can thus be expected.