

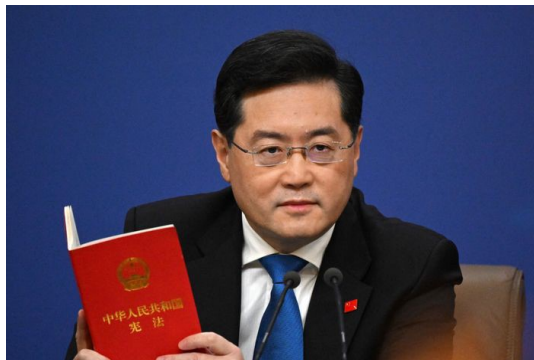
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China's Former Foreign Minister Ousted After Alleged Affair, Senior Officials Told

Qin Gang remains under investigation for possible national security violations, according to people familiar with the matter

By [Lingling Wei](#) [Follow](#)

Sept. 19, 2023 12:36 am ET



Qin Gang, once considered a trusted aide to China's leader, was stripped of his foreign minister title in July. PHOTO: NOEL CELIS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

NEW YORK—Senior Chinese officials were told that an internal Communist Party investigation found former Foreign Minister Qin Gang to have engaged in an extramarital affair that lasted throughout his tenure as Beijing's top envoy to Washington, according to people familiar with the matter.

Qin, once considered a trusted aide to leader Xi Jinping, was stripped of his foreign minister title in July without explanation after he disappeared from public view a month earlier. At one point leading up to his ouster, the Foreign Ministry said the absence of 57-year-old Qin was for health reasons.

Senior Chinese officials—including ministers and provincial leaders—were briefed last month on the party's investigation into Qin, who served as the Chinese ambassador to the U.S. from July 2021 until January this year, the people said. The senior officials were told the formal reason for Qin's dismissal was "lifestyle issues," a common party euphemism for sexual misconduct, according to the people.

The officials were further told that the probe found that Qin had engaged in an extramarital affair that led to the birth of a child in the U.S., two of the people said.

The names of the woman and the child weren't disclosed to the party officials when they were informed about Qin's investigation, the people said, and the Journal couldn't confirm their identities. The investigation is continuing with Qin's cooperation, the people added, and it is now focusing on whether the affair or other conduct by Qin might have compromised China's national security.

The State Council, China's cabinet, still lists Qin as one of the five state councilors. China's Foreign Ministry and the State Council Information Office didn't respond to questions.

The downfall of Qin, who was in the foreign minister post for just seven months, comes as China's leadership seeks to cut off any security vulnerabilities amid the country's intensifying competition with the U.S. and its allies.

Scrutiny of the party's senior ranks, insiders say, is zeroing in on officials involved in dealing with foreigners and the top brass in the Chinese military in charge of ensuring the armed forces' capacity to fight.

Earlier this month, Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu, who is mainly responsible for military relations with other countries, was taken away by authorities for questioning, The Wall Street Journal reported. In July, the commander and political commissar of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force, which controls the country's strategic missiles, were both dismissed with no reason given publicly.

Some economic officials, who have traditionally been granted more leeway to interact with their Western counterparts and foreign business executives, have also increasingly found themselves having to report greater details than before on their dealings as scrutiny deepens, party insiders said.

The high-profile troubles involving the senior diplomatic and military officials, whose appointments were all approved by Xi, are dealing a blow to the leader's efforts to uphold the Chinese-style governance as a more stable and effective alternative to the Western model, political analysts say. China's economy, meanwhile, is suffering a crisis of confidence not seen since the country's opening to the world in the late 1970s.

Turmoil at such high levels in the government and military "would suggest political instability in China at a time when stability is desired due to the economic slowdown," said Yun Sun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank. "It also calls into question whether Xi is truly in control of the overall situation."

The sudden dismissal of Qin also comes as Beijing and Washington have been working for months to pave the way for Xi's expected attendance at a summit of Asia-Pacific leaders to be held in San Francisco in November—and a possible summit there with President Biden. Officials on both sides see that meeting as a potential boost to months of tentative efforts to stabilize ties.

Xi replaced Qin as foreign minister with Wang Yi, a member of the party's elite Politburo and China's top foreign-affairs official. Wang, who met in Malta over the weekend with U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan, has assured Washington the recent thaws in high-level contacts will continue.

With a polished demeanor, Qin was seen as a measured diplomat in his time serving as the Chinese ambassador to the U.S. Xi picked Qin to be China's foreign minister less than two years after he was named Beijing's top envoy to Washington—an unusually fast promotion in a system that traditionally has valued experience in addition to political connections.

Before being named U.S. ambassador, Qin served as a vice minister responsible for planning events for Xi and accompanied the Chinese leader on many of his overseas trips. Qin's close association with Xi has made his fall from grace more intriguing. An information void has fed furious speculation on social media for months, including around the possibility of an extramarital affair.

In China's opaque system, sexual misconduct is often used as a way to discredit fallen officials considered to be disloyal to the party leadership. In Qin's case,

according to the people familiar with the matter, the affair disclosed by the party's investigation triggered his downfall partly because Qin's U.S.-born child could potentially compromise his ability to represent China's interests in dealing with the Americans.

In recent years, Xi has tightened restrictions on high-ranking officials having significant financial or other connections overseas, such as owning large amounts of assets abroad.

The rules are intended to minimize geopolitical risks for Beijing amid growing concerns that officials with significant overseas exposure could become a liability if the U.S. and other Western powers impose sanctions against them, similar to what was done against Moscow following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In addition, in his more than a decade of rule of China, Xi has time and again directed his ire at corruption in the party and the tales of senior members' lavish lifestyles and harems of mistresses that fed public cynicism about the party's leadership.

"You people, you either eat and drink yourselves into the grave, or die between the sheets," Xi said at a meeting with senior officials earlier in his tenure, according to people briefed on the remarks.

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