



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on March 17, 2012

Bo Xilai Purged in China's Communist Party Shakeup

As Party Secretary governing Chongqing (formerly Chungking), a sprawling megalopolis of 30 million people, Bo appeared to be on the way up. He was a member of the national 24-member governing Politburo and was expected by many to be appointed to the all-powerful nine-member Standing Committee of the Politburo. It is very unlikely, to say the least, that that will happen now.



No official explanations have been given for the abrupt purging. China's official news agency Xinhuanet provided this bare-bones [announcement](#) of Bo Xilai's removal and replacement:

Zhang Dejiang has been appointed Party chief of Chongqing, replacing Bo Xilai, according to a decision of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee announced Thursday. Bo will no longer serve as secretary, standing committee member or member of the CPC Chongqing municipal committee.

The decision was announced by Li Yuanchao, head of the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee, at a meeting of officials in Chongqing on Thursday, according to a report on [xinhuanet.com](#). Li said the CPC Central Committee made the decision after discreet consideration and based on current circumstances and the overall situation.

Unlike the typical stiff, stolid Communist Party leader, Bo is known for his casual, western style of political showmanship. A charismatic and cultured "princeling" who comes from the ranks of privileged Party members from the era of Mao Zedong, Bo speaks fluent English and mixes easily with politicians and business leaders from the United States and Europe. But his style can be deceiving. Bo is no "liberal" bent on moving China toward greater political openness, transparency, and improved human rights. To the contrary, Bo had caused considerable alarm at home and abroad with his populist appeals to rekindle the violent Communist zeal of Mao's "Cultural Revolution." As we reported last August (["Kissinger Sings Convergence Theme With China's 'Red Song' Choir"](#)), Bo hosted Henry Kissinger at Chongqing's huge propaganda festival aimed at reigniting revolutionary fervor and Party devotion.

Other Party leaders, apparently, saw Bo's showboating as an attempt to build his own cult of personality, something that could threaten their collective leadership process.

Wang Lijun's foiled defection

There is another likely cause for the timing of Bo Xilai's fall from grace. It involves Wang Lijun, a high-profile protégé and political sidekick of Bo Xilai. As Vice Mayor and Chief of Police of Chongqing City, Wang Lijun had carved out an image as a fearless crime fighter, waging war on the city's powerful Triad gangs and corrupt officials. Wang had become one of China's most famous figures, a hero to many. And his aggressive (many critics say brutal) anti-crime program was a centerpiece of Bo's "reform" platform.



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On February 6, Wang donned a disguise to slip past the secret police teams keeping surveillance on his residence and drove four hours to the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. According to some reports, Wang arrived at the U.S. Consulate around 9:00 p.m. and asked for asylum but was denied after the consul sought direction from U.S. Amb. Gary Locke in Beijing, who then checked with the White House. Having learned of Wang's whereabouts, Bo reportedly sent 70 police cars and more than a hundred police officers to surround the U.S. Consulate. Bo's "invasion" of a neighboring province and jeopardizing of foreign relations apparently upset not only the CPC officials in Chengdu but in Beijing as well. Sichuan's provincial police and national police were sent in to expel Bo's Chongqing police from Chengdu.

At about 6:00 p.m. the following day, February 7, Wang Lijun left the U.S. Consulate and was taken to Beijing by the Vice Minister from the Ministry of Public Security. Did the Obama administration deny Wang asylum? If so, why? Was it merely to prevent a hiccup in Sino-American relations? Did the administration throw a defector to the wolves in order to have a smooth smile-fest event for what was then the [pending visit](#) of China's Vice-President Xi Jinping?

The U.S. State Department has not provided any information on the Wang Lijun case, aside from this [transcript](#) of a daily press briefing on February 8 with Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland:

QUESTION: — specifically these reports coming out of China that a deputy mayor of Chongqing had sought refuge at the consulate in Chengdu and that there had been an unexpected increase in security personnel around the consulate for a while. What can you tell us about any of this?

MS. NULAND: Well, I think you're referring to reports about the vice mayor of Chongqing — right — City. So his name is Wang Lijun. Wang Lijun did request a meeting at the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu earlier this week in his capacity as vice mayor. The meeting was scheduled, our folks met with him, he did visit the consulate and he later left the consulate of his own volition. So — and obviously, we don't talk about issues having to do with refugee status, asylum, et cetera.

QUESTION: Okay. But — so can you tell us exactly when that meeting took place?

MS. NULAND: I believe — we're here on Wednesday — I believe it was Monday, but if that is not right, we will get back to you.

QUESTION: Do you have any information about what — have you had any subsequent contact with him? Because there's some questions about his whereabouts.

MS. NULAND: Yeah. To my knowledge, we have not.

QUESTION: And aside from any possible thing that you couldn't talk about on asylum can you tell us what he did talk about there? What was the purpose of this meeting?

MS. NULAND: Frankly, I don't have anything at the moment on the substance of the meeting.

QUESTION: Can you say why you said he used — why you used the term, "he left the consulate of his — on his own volition"?

MS. NULAND: Well again, there has been some reporting to indicate that that might not have been the case, but it was the case.

QUESTION: Okay. The reporting being that he had been forced to leave or that had been dragged out, or —



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MS. NULAND: There's been unusual reporting about all of this. So just to reaffirm for you, that he walked out, it was his choice.

Of course, if the Obama administration refused to grant Wang Lijun asylum, as reported in various accounts, then was the choice to leave really "his choice"?

What has become of Wang Lijun? *China Daily*, the CPC's official English-language newspaper, does not shed any light on his current status or whereabouts, merely offering this [report today](#) concerning his replacement:

The Central Committee of the CPC has decided to remove Wang Lijun from the position of deputy mayor of Chongqing, a senior official with the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee confirmed on Thursday.

Wang's removal is being handled according to procedures, the official told xinhuanet.com.

He Ting, deputy governor and police chief of Qinghai province, has been nominated to replace Wang as deputy mayor of Chongqing.

Photo of Bo Xilai: AP Images

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