



Former Chinese President Reappears After “Mysterious Exit” From Party Congress

Former Chinese president Hu Jintao emerged in public again for the first time since [his mysterious exit from the closing ceremony](#) of the Communist Party’s Congress around six weeks ago.

Hu was one of the participants at a tribute for former president Jiang Zemin at the Chinese People’s Liberation Army General Hospital in Beijing on Monday, based on reports from China Central Television.

The former president could be seen walking unsteadily while accompanied by an attendant at the event, which was held to commemorate the late Jiang before his body was taken to be cremated.



YouTube

Hu Jintao being escorted from Party Congress

On October 22, Hu was led away from his seat next to incumbent President Xi Jinping halfway through the carefully choreographed closing ceremony of the once-every-five-years Congress. Hu appeared puzzled then as he was escorted away by an attendant, fueling rumors over what happened to him.

The official Xinhua news agency announced in a tweet later that Hu was ill and needed rest. The tweet also stated that “now, he is much better.”

Having secured a landmark third term in power at the Congress, Xi filled the party’s top decision-making bodies with loyalists.

“Hu’s presence at official ceremonies honoring Jiang shows Xi trying to create an image of unity that bolsters his position as leader,” said Neil Thomas, a China analyst at Eurasia Group, a political risk advisory and consulting firm.

“Hu’s reappearance lends somewhat more credence to the theory that his ejection from the party congress was not an orchestrated purge but, rather, an unplanned event that resulted from some kind of health incident,” Thomas said.

He added that the government has not provided enough details about the incident at the Congress to be sure of what transpired.

During the Congress, a steward went over to Hu and they spoke briefly. It is still uncertain as to what the conversation was about.

At one point, Li Zhanshu, the party’s third-ranking official, who was sitting to Hu’s left, reached over and took the stack of documents in front of the former president.

Another steward then came over and convinced Hu to leave. A frail-looking Hu appeared hesitant, even after one of the stewards pulled him up from his chair.

By now, it was certain that these events were not choreographed.



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 9, 2022

As he was about to be led off the stage, Hu said something to Xi, who nodded. He also appeared to have said something to his protegee, Premier Li Keqiang, who also nodded.

Hu patted Li's shoulder as he left, as most of his party colleagues stared firmly ahead.

Hu had been present at the Party Congress as part of the presidium standing committee, the body that oversees the twice-a-decade congress. The 46-member committee consists of present leaders as well as party leaders and retired senior officials.

Also part of the committee are former premiers Zhu Rongji, 93, and Wen Jiabao, 80. Zhu, who is rumored to be in poor health, was absent from the Congress.

A clip of the mysterious moment involving Hu, posted on Twitter by *The Straits Times*, has gone viral, garnering more than nine million views.

China watchers analyzed the 85-second-long footage, with some speculating that Hu had been made to leave after a dispute with Xi.

The end of the Party Congress would indicate that top officials including Li Keqiang and Wang Yang, who helms the top advisory body to China's Parliament, would not be in the party's new Central Committee.

Both men are regarded to be part of the Communist Youth League faction, to which Hu belongs.

Such speculations show how Chinese elite politics have become less transparent under Xi, who has tried to prevent leaks. Snippets such as Hu's escort off the stage could provide rare glimpses of party dynamics.

Although the clip has fueled intense debate outside of China, there has been no mention of it on Chinese social media, which is heavily censored by CCP authorities.

Two opposing theories rapidly developed among China observers. The first theory speculated that Xi was out to publicly embarrass Hu and purge him. Many observers speculated that Xi had capitalized on the moment to indicate that there were no more roadblocks to his authority in helming the world's No. 2 economy. After all, none of Hu's Communist Youth League faction allies were eventually part of the standing committee. Hu's protegee, Vice-Premier Hu Chunhua, who was regarded as a certain candidate for that elite committee, was even excluded from the next-level Politburo.

The second viewpoint theorized that Hu planned this incident to humiliate Xi by waiting for journalists to be let into the hall before the incident happened.

Internet sleuths quickly zoomed in on the contents of that first page of the folder that Hu wanted to see. The page seems to reveal a list of the new Central Committee members, who had just been nominated that morning.

Another theory asserted that Hu was Covid-19-positive, and his test result had only just been known — hence the need for his immediate removal. Yet some journalists dismissed this theory, saying it was not credible.

Some mainstream journalists concluded that the most plausible theory was that Hu has dementia and suffered a lapse in intelligibility during that moment of struggle. Hu might have wanted to have a look at the Central Committee names, but that list had not yet been publicly released. Moreover, cameras focused on Hu and others on stage and the Party could not afford to let cameras zoom in on the list of names.



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Other observers questioned the lack of empathy or care from any of the leaders onstage, who all sat in silence staring ahead, if Hu was really unwell. Till today, it is still unclear as to what exactly happened, as well as the reasons for Hu's departure. Those in the know about the Communist Party of China's inclination for control will understand why the state censorship apparatus immediately went into action, blocking searches, text messages, and even e-mail attachments with Hu's name, sparking various theories. Videos of Hu's exit from stage were also banned from circulating within China.



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