

The Bo Xilai Affair in Central Leadership Politics

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From a procedural perspective, the removal of Bo Xilai from Chongqing and from the party Politburo resembles the 2006 purge of Shanghai party boss Chen Liangyu and the 1995 takedown of Beijing City party chief Chen Xitong. Bo's removal in that respect therefore does not indicate a departure from the "rules of the game" as played in the last two decades. From a political perspective, each of the three purges—of the two Chens and of Bo Xilai—removed an irritant to the top leadership at an important moment of transition. The Politburo leadership has, publicly at least, sustained its usual façade of unity throughout the Bo affair, and Bo's removal likely strengthens rather than disrupts preparations for convocation of the 18th Party Congress this fall.

The Fall of Bo Xilai

The train of events that led to Bo Xilai's removal from his post as Chongqing party chief began on 28 January, when Wang Lijun, deputy mayor and public security chief of the Chongqing City government, reported to Bo that investigation into a corruption case had implicated members of his family. In response, Bo reportedly pushed the Chongqing CCP Committee to reassign Wang from police work to the city government's education and science and technology post. When his associates in the city's public security bureau came under counter-investigations instituted by Bo's allies, Wang began to fear for his future, and on 6 February, having driven to the adjacent province of Sichuan, he entered the American consulate in Chengdu. After a day's negotiations with Chongqing Mayor Huang Qifan, Wang left the consulate on the 7th and was escorted to Beijing by a contingent of officers from the Ministry of State Security, which is in charge of security issues involving foreigners in China. Shortly thereafter a central investigation into the Wang affair was launched.

On 5 March, the annual session of China's parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC), opened in Beijing. On the 8th, according to Xinhua that day, Zhou Yongkang, the Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of China's internal security affairs, joined Bo and the Chongqing delegation to the NPC for group discussions. On the 9th, Bo and the Chongqing delegates to the NPC convened an apparently impromptu press conference.¹ In his remarks, Bo responded to questions about the Wang Lijun affair by defending the conduct of Chongqing's campaign since 2009 to suppress criminal gangs (the "strike the black" effort—打黑) in the city. The campaign, Bo states, was the work not just of Wang but also of the city's public security bureau, prosecutorial and judicial bodies, and party discipline inspection commission together, and it was coordinated with the Central Committee's Political and Legal Commission under Zhou Yongkang.

Five days later, on the 14th, Premier Wen Jiabao was asked by a Singapore reporter about the Wang affair at his annual press conference as the NPC was about to close. Noting that the affair had provoked a high degree of domestic and international concern, Wen announced that relevant agencies had begun a “special investigation” that already had made progress. While acknowledging the “obvious achievements” Chongqing had made over several years, Wen called on the city’s party and government leadership “to reflect and to draw lessons from the Wang Lijun affair” (反思,并认真王立军吸取教训). He concluded that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had itself taken a “tortuous path” since the PRC’s founding and had since the 1978 Third Plenum and the 1981 resolution on party history (which assessed Mao Zedong’s leadership and condemned the Cultural Revolution) adopted the policy course of “reform and opening up.” These concluding remarks resonated with remarks Wen made much earlier in his long press conference that stressed the necessity of renewed political reform—and especially in the “party and state leadership system”—for the advance of economic reform. Without this reform, Wen warned, such issues as income inequality, loss of faith in the political system, and corruption could trigger “historical tragedies” like the Cultural Revolution again. The next day, the Hong Kong–based Xinhua subsidiary China News Service cited Central Party School researcher Ye Duchu—in the past an authoritative commentator on internal party goings-on—on the significance of Wen’s comments. Wen’s remarks about the Wang affairs and on the need for the Chongqing leadership to “reflect and draw lessons,” Ye stated, were not his own formulation but rather “word for word” reflected a consensus among the top leadership that leaders must be held accountable for what goes on under their purview.

The next day, on 15 March, Xinhua announced without elaboration that “Comrade” Bo Xilai would “no longer serve concurrently” (不在兼任—implying that he remained a Politburo member) as Chongqing party chief and had been replaced by Politburo member Zhang Dejiang. In Chongqing that day, the leadership change was announced by Li Yuanchao, member of the Politburo and Secretariat and director of the Party Organization Department, as Zhang took up his new post in the city. Finally, on 10 April, Xinhua reported that “Comrade” Bo Xilai was under investigation by the Central Discipline Investigation Commission (CDIC) for “suspected serious disciplinary violations” and had been “suspended” (停止) as a member of the Politburo. In a separate dispatch, Xinhua reported that Bo’s wife, Gu Kailai, was under arrest in connection with the murder of a British businessman, Neil Heywood. *People’s Daily* followed up with three successive Commentator Articles (评论员—an authoritative level of comment): on the 11th calling for party-wide support for the Politburo’s decision to remove Bo; on the 12th calling on the country to focus on economic work “without distraction”; and on the 13th stressing that everyone is equal before the law and emphasizing the need for strict party discipline.

The Two Chens

The unfolding cashiering of Bo Xilai resembles in key respects the fall of two other Politburo members over the past 15 years—former Beijing party chief Chen Xitong in 1995 and former Shanghai party boss Chen Liangyu in 2006. Chen Xitong’s downfall began with a corruption investigation into the leadership of the Hong Kong–based

international division of the important state-owned enterprise Capital Iron and Steel in early 1995. That investigation soon implicated Beijing Vice Mayor Wang Baosen on suspicion of “economic crimes.” On 4 April, the day after receiving a summons from the CDIC and state prosecutor’s office, Wang committed suicide.

Under these circumstances, Chen Xitong submitted his resignation, which the Politburo “accepted” because of Chen’s “unshirkable responsibilities for Wang Baosen’s case,” according to Xinhua on 27 April. That day, CDIC Chairman Wei Jianxing took Chen’s post as Beijing City party chief at a meeting of Beijing City party leaders presided over by Hu Jintao—then Politburo Standing Committee member and, as executive secretary of the Secretariat, the person in charge of the party apparatus—and Party Organization Department Director Zhang Quanjing (Xinhua, 29 April 1995).

PRC media depicted the Wang investigation and Chen’s resignation from his Beijing party chief post as the products of an ongoing anti-corruption drive that was launched in 1993 and took on new energy in January 1995 to hunt “both tigers and flies.” On 29 April 1995, for example, the PRC-owned Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po* dismissed rumors and speculation that Chen’s removal reflected an ongoing factional power struggle in the top leadership as “sheer nonsense.” Later, on 10 May, the Hong Kong-based Xinhua subsidiary China News Service cited then Dalian Mayor Bo Xilai, in typical grandstanding form, as expressing concern that “currently, corruption has become increasingly serious” and that “the central government must resolutely crack down and not be soft.”

On 4 July 1995, Xinhua reported that the investigation into Wang Baosen’s crimes had implicated Chen Xitong on “a number of major issues” and that the Politburo had decided to open an investigation of “the problems of Comrade Chen Xitong.” The same day, Xinhua announced that the CDIC had expelled Wang Baosen posthumously from the party. Wang had embezzled Y250,000 and diverted Y100 million of public funds to his brother, mistress, and others; illegally approved bank loans resulting in serious losses of public funds; and squandered public money on luxury villas and apartments. Wang, Xinhua observed, “was morally degenerate and had lived a rotten life.” A *People’s Daily* Commentator Article on 5 July hailed the party’s “decisive” exposure of Wang’s case as “a major achievement in the anti-corruption struggle” but did not mention the investigation of Chen Xitong.

On 28 September 1995, the press communiqué of the 14th Central Committee’s Fifth Plenum recorded that the session had approved a CDIC report on “the question of Comrade Chen Xitong” and “dismissed” him from the Politburo and Central Committee. Chen had “led a dissolute and extravagant life, abused power to seek illegal interests for his relatives and other people, and accepted valuable gifts by taking advantage of his position and while performing public duties,” the communiqué stated, adding that “his mistakes [were] serious” and that the investigation would continue because some things were still not clear. On the 29th, the Hong Kong communist newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* applauded the plenum’s action in taking down “an out-and-out tiger.”

Finally, on 27 August 1997, the eve of the 15th Party Congress, the CDIC expelled Chen from the CCP, a decision the 14th Central Committee's Seventh Plenum endorsed on September. On 27 February 1998 Chen was arrested, and in June he was put on trial for "a corrupt and decadent life." On 31 July 1998 Chen was sentenced to 16 years in prison, a verdict that the PRC Supreme Court upheld the following month. On 21 August 1998 a *People's Daily* Commentator Article hailed the Chen case as exemplifying the principle that all are equal before the law.

Chen Liangyu

The takedown of Shanghai party boss Chen Liangyu in 2006 also began with corruption charges against subordinates. Xinhua on 24 August 2006 reported that Shanghai Discipline Inspection Commission investigations into misuse of funds by the city government's Labor and Social Security Bureau had implicated Qin Yu, formerly Chen Liangyu's personal secretary. A month later, Xinhua reported the Politburo on 24 September reviewing a CDIC report on "Comrade Chen Liangyu's problems." According to Xinhua, the "preliminary investigation" cited Chen's involvement in the Shanghai social security fund scandal and "other disciplinary violations, such as helping to further the economic interests of illegal entrepreneurs, protecting his staff who severely violated laws and discipline, and furthering the interests of family members by taking advantage of his official posts." "His malpractice," the investigation concluded, "has created a baleful political influence."

The 24 September Politburo meeting—evidently an extraordinary session, because it was followed the next day by another meeting on business of a more usual nature—"suspended" (停止) Chen's Politburo membership and appointed Shanghai Mayor Han Zheng as interim party chief in the city. On the 25th, Chen's removal and Han's appointment were announced at a meeting of city leaders in Shanghai by Politburo member and Organization Department Director He Guoqiang, who stressed the need for stability.

Over succeeding months, PRC media reported several more Shanghai officials under investigation in connection with the Chen affair, including the director and deputy director of the city's state assets administration, as well as at least one major national figure—the former director of the State Statistics Bureau Qiu Xiaohua, who reportedly kept a stash of Y1 million in his office. In the meantime, Han Zheng announced that all Y3.2 billion purloined from the city's social security fund had been retrieved. (Xinhua, 28 January 2007) On 24 March 2007, Xi Jinping was appointed party chief in Shanghai.

Finally, on 26 July, according to Xinhua, the Politburo expelled Chen from the party and turned him over for state prosecution, a decision that the 16th Central Committee's Seventh Plenum affirmed in October. According to the Xinhua account, among his other offenses, Chen had "misused power in supporting Shanghai Labor and Social Security Bureau to grant huge loans from the Shanghai social security funds to private companies illegally" and aided private companies purchase shares of state-owned enterprises, "causing great damage to public assets." A CDIC spokesman on 2 August confirmed that

Chen was in jail awaiting trial. On 13 April 2008, Xinhua reported, Chen was sentenced to 18 years in prison and his personal property was ordered to be confiscated.

The Three Cases in Perspective

From the perspective of party and legal procedure, the parallels between the cases of Bo Xilai and the two Chens are many. All three were removed on major charges of corruption and blatant violations of party discipline. The Bo case involved the additional element of murder of a foreign businessman and the complicity of Bo's wife in his acts of corruption. Chen Liangyu's case also involved spousal complicity in purloining social security funds, and in the Chen Xitong case, the suicide of high-level associate was also involved. Comparable procedures were used in each man's removal from party leadership posts and in the installation of his replacement.

In the cases of the two Chens, each man was subsequently turned over for criminal prosecution, resulting in lengthy prison terms. A comparable fate likely awaits Bo Xilai. Specifically, the CDIC may submit a report to the Politburo later this summer leading to Bo's expulsion from the party, a judgment that would then be submitted to the 17th Central Committee's Seventh Plenum for approval on the eve of the 18th Party Congress. Bo would then be turned over for legal prosecution and ultimately imprisonment.

Bo's removal in that respect therefore does not indicate a departure from the "rules of the game" as played in the last two decades. The reform era initiated by Deng Xiaoping has seen the emergence of a more legalistic exit mechanism for removing high party leaders. In contrast to the last two decades of Mao's leadership, when purged leaders were subjected to long ideologically framed campaigns of media denunciation and became political non-persons, fallen leaders in the reform era have been portrayed in the media as having been removed through routine party procedures for political mistakes and, in some cases where crimes were committed, through legal processes. Mao's successor Hua Guofeng, for example, was replaced as party chairman in 1981 but remained a member of the Politburo until 1982, as well as a Central Committee member until 2002. Hu Yaobang was removed as party general secretary in January 1987 but remained a member of the Politburo until his death in April 1989. Zhao Ziyang was removed as party general secretary in May 1989 and lived under house arrest until his death in 2005. By contrast, after his removal from the Politburo Standing Committee in April 1976, Deng Xiaoping was subject to an unending media campaign of political denunciation until he was rehabilitated in July 1977.

Bo's removal under the prevailing rules of the game does not make his fall any less political, and here again there are clear parallels with the fall of the two Chens. From a political perspective, the purge of each man removed an obstacle or irritant to the top leadership at an important moment of transition. Chen Xitong's removal in 1995 complemented other steps by Jiang Zemin to consolidate power, in that case by crushing an important bastion of conservative resistance—the Beijing City party committee. The previous fall, at the 14th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum, Jiang had promoted Huang Ju onto the Politburo and Wu Bangguo and Jiang Chunyun onto the Secretariat, consolidating a "Shanghai Gang" bloc in the leadership. In the same period, conservative

elders were finally dying off, most notably, Chen Yun on 10 April 1995, two weeks before Chen Xitong's replacement in the Beijing party committee. In 2006, the elimination of Chen Liangyu removed an outspoken critic—from Shanghai, a major power in China's economy—of Premier Wen Jiabao's effort to recentralize direction of national economic policy. Chen's purge, together with the death of Huang Ju in June 2007, broke the back of the so-called Shanghai Gang associated with retired top leader Jiang Zemin as Hu Jintao moved to consolidate power at the 2007 17th Party Congress. Bo Xilai's removal takes down a comparable political irritant and potential adversary in elite politics on the eve of the 18th CCP Congress.

Leadership Splits over Bo?

From a broader perspective, the spectacular surge of public attention that the Bo Xilai affair triggered in China's burgeoning social media underscores how rapidly the new media are transforming the public opinion environment that the regime has to address. As the Bo scandal unfolded, the regime appeared constantly scrambling to catch up with and deflate the flood of sensationalistic rumors, speculations, and outright fantasies that consumed public attention and spilled over into the foreign media, and to control uses of the social media that it perceived as destabilizing political order. The regime worked in similar fashion to shape and control public attention to the Chen Liangyu purge in 2006, when China's new media were only just emerging. When Chen Xitong was removed in 1995, China's internet was just starting and there were no social media.

The Politburo leadership has, publicly at least, sustained a careful façade of unity throughout the Bo affair. Media commentary has dismissed speculation that the Bo Xilai affair reflects an underlying contest for power at the top and has rebutted claims that the leadership is split over how to handle the Bo case. In particular, media commentary sought to discredit assertions that Zhou Yongkang was under a cloud for too close an association with Bo or because of an effort to defend Bo. “Despite rumors circulating abroad regarding Zhou Yongkang,” a commentary transmitted by the Hong Kong-based Xinhua subsidiary China News Service on 15 May, “his work duties have been normal, as evident from media reports and his public activities.”

As self-serving as these rebuttals may be, the evidence that Zhou has been in political trouble because of Bo Xilai's fall is thin or outright mistaken. Despite a meme widely circulated by foreign and independent Hong Kong media that Zhou disappeared from public view for a week or more following Bo Xilai's replacement, Zhou appeared in public even more regularly in that period. According to PRC media reporting, Zhou in fact appeared on 15, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30 March—10 days out of the last 16 that month. By comparison, Zhou appeared only six times the entire 29-day month of February (7, 8, 13, 14, 15, and 17) and 13 days the entire month of January (1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21 & 22). From 5 to 14 March, he appeared nearly every day, mostly because of the NPC.

The conclusion that Zhou and Bo were politically linked has also been inferred from the fact that Zhou met Bo at the NPC on 8 March. But from the broader perspective of

Politburo Standing Committee leaders holding formal meetings with regional delegations during an NPC session, Zhou's meeting with Bo on the 8th does not appear anything but routine. NPC session are attended by 33 regional delegations: one each from China's 31 province-level regions, one representing Taiwan (despite its being under different management at present), and one representing Hong Kong and Macao. Over the course of an annual NPC session, each regional delegation holds a group discussion with one (and normally only one) Politburo Standing Committee leader.² How the leadership decides who will meet with which regional delegation during an NPC session is not clear. Over the past four NPC sessions, there are some clear patterns, as table 1 shows. Some leaders appear to meet each year with a delegation from a province they previously served in—Hu Jintao, for example, has met the Tibet delegation each year since 2009 at least, as has Wen Jiabao the Gansu delegation, Jia Qinglin the Beijing delegation, Xi Jinping the Shanghai delegation, and Li Keqiang the Liaoning delegation. But this is not universally the case—Hu Jintao, for example has not met the Guizhou delegation in the past four years, nor has Li Changchun met the delegations representing Henan or Guangdong. In addition, some Politburo Standing Committee members regularly meet a particular provincial delegation despite never having served there: He Guoqiang has regularly met the Hunan delegation in each of the past four sessions, and Zhou Yongkang has regularly met the Heilongjiang delegation. Whatever logic explains who meets which regional delegations to the NPC, Zhou Yongkang's meeting with Bo Xilai and the Chongqing delegation this year appears routine.

Table 1

*PBSC Member Meetings with Regional Delegations to the 11th NPC's 2nd–5th Sessions**

<i>Hu Jintao</i>	2012: Yunnan, Xizang , Jiangsu 2011: Jiangsi, Nei Monggol, Xizang 2010: Henan, Tianjin, Xizang , Jiangsu 2009: Guangdong, Xizang , Jiangsu
<i>Wu Bangguo</i>	2012: Zhejiang, Jilin, Qinghai, Anhui 2011: Anhui, Hebei, Hainan, Guangdong 2010: Shanxi, Yunnan, Hubei 2009: Chongqing, Shandong, Shaanxi, Anhui
<i>Wen Jiabao</i>	2012: Tianjin, Guangxi, Shaanxi, Gansu 2011: Jilin, Jiangxi, Gansu , Fujian 2010: Guizhou, Hebei, Shandong, Anhui, Gansu 2009: Gansu , Hubei, Zhejiang, Nei Monggol
<i>Jia Qinglin</i>	2012: Beijing , Taiwan 2011: Beijing , Tianjin 2010: Beijing , Taiwan 2009: Beijing , Taiwan
<i>Li Changchun</i>	2012: Nei Monggol, Hainan, Hebei, Sichuan

2011: Sichuan, Tianjin, Shandong, Guizhou
 2010: Shaanxi, Qinghai, Fujian, Sichuan
 2009: Jilin, Ningxia, Guangxi, Sichuan

Xi Jinping 2012: Shandong, Xinjiang, **Shanghai**, Hong Kong/Macao
 2011: **Shanghai**, Henan, Yunnan, HongKong/Macao
 2010: Guangxi, **Zhejiang**, **Shanghai**, Hong Kong/Macao
 2009: **Fujian**, Hong Kong/Macao, Shanxi, **Shanghai**

Li Keqiang 2012: **Liaoning**, Hubei, Fujian, Guizhou
 2011: Zhejiang, Shanxi, Qinghai, **Liaoning**
 2010: **Liaoning**, Guangdong, Ningxia, Hainan
 2009: **Liaoning**, Xinjiang, Jiangxi, Yunnan

* **Boldface** indicates provinces in which the Standing Committee leader has served in the past.

Much speculation has also attached to the observation that eight of nine Politburo Standing Committee members have visited Chongqing since Bo was posted as party chief there in December 2007. But viewed from the broader pattern of Politburo Standing Committee inspection tours of the provinces over the same period, the number of visits to Chongqing does not stand out, as table 2 suggests.

Table 2
*Provincial Appearances by Politburo Standing Committee Members Since the 17th CCP Congress (November 2007–May 2012)**

Province	Hu Jintao	Wang Bangguo	Wen Jiabao	Jia Qinglin	Li Changchun	Xi Jinping	Liang Kejiang	He Guoqiang	Zhou Yongkang	#
Hebei	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	7
Liaoning	X		X	X				X	X	5
Jilin	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		7
Heilongjiang	X		X	X	X		X			5
Tianjin	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	7
Shandong	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	7
Jiangsu		X	X				X		X	4
Shanghai	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Anhui	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	8
Zhejiang			X	X			X	X	X	5
Fujian		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	7
Guangdong	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	7
Hainan	X		X	X		X	X	X		6
Guangxi	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Henan	X	X	X						X	4
Hubei			X			X	X		X	4
Hunan			X	X		X	X	X	X	6
Jiangxi	X		X	X		X	X		X	6
Shanxi	X		X		X		X	X		5
Shaanxi	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		7

Gansu	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	8
Chongqing		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Sichuan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Guizhou	X		X	X		X		X		5
Yunnan	X		X	X	X		X	X		6
Nei Monggol	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	7
Qinghai	X						X	X	X	4
Ningxia	X		X	X			X	X	X	6
Xinjiang	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	7
Xizang						X		X		2
Total for each member	23	9	29	24	15	20	26	23	23	

*Beijing is omitted from this tally for the obvious reason that the Politburo Standing Committee resides in Beijing. Note that figures in the “#” column represent the total number of times a province was visited by PSC members.

From this perspective, the eight inspection tours of Chongqing during Bo’s tenure is matched by an equal number of visits to Gansu, Guangxi, and Anhui, and surpassed by visits to Shanghai and Sichuan, each of which received nine of nine Politburo Standing Committee members. Nine provinces received seven Standing Committee members. Tibet received only two.

The strongest evidence linking Zhou Yongkang, and possibly He Guoqiang, to Bo Xilai is their endorsement of Bo’s “strike the black” campaign against criminal gangs in Chongqing. Zhou has repeatedly addressed Chongqing’s “strike the black” campaign, which began in June 2009:

- A 27 October 2009 report in *Chongqing Daily* on the progress of the campaign noted that, as an expression of support among the central leadership, Zhou had endorsed the campaign in a written instruction on 25 September stating it was “a project to win the people’s hearts.”
- According to a 30 October 2009 Xinhua dispatch in English, at a plenum of the Central Committee for Management of Public Security, Zhou urged progress in a national effort to break organized crime. The dispatch then took positive note of ongoing gang trials in Chongqing. A 31 October China News Service report on the same meeting set Zhou’s comment in the context of a national effort against criminal gangs mandated as part of the criteria to evaluate leader performance in the run-up to the 18th Party Congress. On 10 November, Xinhua called the Chongqing campaign “just the tip of the iceberg in a nationwide battle against crime gangs,” citing ongoing efforts in Guizhou, Hunan, Gansu, and Anhui.
- During his meeting with Bo Xilai and the Chongqing delegation to the NPC session in March 2010, according to Xinhua’s account, Zhou’s comments focused on the need for “social justice and fairness” in ensuring stability and, among several “achievements” in the city, gave only passing reference to Chongqing’s success in cracking down on criminal gangs. In *Chongqing Daily*’s far longer account on 14 March 2010, Zhou listened to reports from the Chongqing delegates on a wide range of issues, including reports from three Chongqing deputies on the progress of the campaign. According to that account, Zhou took

notes and acquired “a better understanding” of the campaign’s successes, and “fully affirmed Chongqing’s efforts in this area.”

- During his November 2010 inspection tour of the city, according to Xinhua, Zhou “observed an organized crime crackdown demonstration and expressed his full commendation for the contributions police have made in protecting people’s lives, property, and safety and in upholding social justice.”

But judgment of this association with Bo and Chongqing must be tempered in light of Zhou’s overarching responsibility for internal security and legal affairs as director of the Central Committee’s Politics and Law Committee. In that capacity, Zhou routinely comments on local internal security and legal issues when touring the provinces and in formal NPC discussions with regional delegations. In 2011, for example, Zhou made half a dozen inspections in provinces in other parts of China and routinely commented on internal security and “social management” issues in the course of his tour. And so it is not altogether clear that his support for Chongqing’s “strike the black” campaign as part of a nationwide effort against criminal gangs exceeds what normally proceeds from his policy portfolio. Judgment of He Guoqiang’s connections with Bo Xilai must similarly be tempered in light of his overarching responsibilities for party discipline, in addition to his tenure preceding Bo as Chongqing party chief.

Party Congress on Track?

Bo’s removal likely strengthens rather than disrupts preparations for convocation of the 18th Party Congress this fall. Contrary to widespread speculation, Bo Xilai did not seem a likely candidate for the Politburo Standing Committee to be appointed by the new Central Committee after the 18th Party Congress. His grandstanding propensity to play to the media, and especially to the foreign press, suggested a political personality unlikely to accommodate the leadership style of collective consensus-building in an oligarchy that has flourished in the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras.³

In addition, the Bo affair appears to pit princelings against princelings in the leadership. As the prospective successor to Hu Jintao later this year, Xi Jinping—son of a prominent party veteran and ally of Deng Xiaoping—has no evident interest in supporting Bo, also the son of a prominent revolutionary veteran, against others in the top leadership. In that regard, Bo’s removal improves prospects of a smooth transition. From this perspective, the framework of leadership politics that has seen a princeling elitist faction pitted against a populist faction of leaders with backgrounds in the Communist Youth League during Hu’s tenure seems to offer little purchase in interpreting the Bo affair.

A *People’s Daily* Commentator Article published on 4 April in the wake of the NPC session, called on the party and nation to work to greet the convocation of the party congress “with full confidence.” Meanwhile, election of delegates to the party congress appears to be nearing completion. A first wave of party congresses in 14 provinces began in October 2011 and was completed in December. The remaining 17 provincial party congresses are to be completed in a second wave that began in April and will end in June

this year. Concurrent party congresses have been under way among the eight other electoral blocs and will be completed by the end of June 2012.

Foreign—though not PRC—media reported an enlarged meeting of Central Committee members in early May at which a poll was taken regarding appointments to the new Politburo. If the reporting is accurate, this meeting appears to be a repetition of a straw poll taken among Central Committee membership in June 2007 for the Politburo’s reference in its effort to assess and nominate candidates for the new leadership heading into the 17th Party Congress.⁴ One departure from party congress preparations in the past, however, has been that so far Hu Jintao has not delivered a speech at the Central Party School previewing major themes to be discussed in the report he will deliver at the upcoming party congress on the work of the outgoing Central Committee. In each party congress year since 1992, the general secretary has delivered such a speech at the Central Party School, an event that has always received significant attention in the media.

Notes

¹ According to one Hong Kong newspaper account, journalists were not notified under usual procedures—announcement by the NPC session’s secretariat the day before—but rather by text message two hours before the event. Bo’s remarks appear not to have been covered by Xinhua, though they were described briefly in *Global Times* and extensively in *Chongqing Daily* and the PRC-controlled Hong Kong newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*. See *South China Morning Post*, 10 March 2012; *Global Times Online* in English, 10 March 2012; *Chongqing Daily* (重庆日报), 11 March 2012, p.1; and *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报), 10 March 2012.

² The single exception in the past four years, as reported by Xinhua, were the meetings of Li Changchun and Zhou Yongkang with the Sichuan delegation during the 11th NPC’s Third Session in March 2010.

³ On this view, see “The 18th Central Committee Politburo: A Quixotic, Foolhardy, Rashly Speculative, But Nonetheless Ruthlessly Reasoned Projection,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 33 (Summer 2010).

⁴ For more details on the 2007 meeting, see “The Road to the 18th Party Congress,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36 (Winter 2012).